

A THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION:
A LOOK AT THE CONTRIBUTION OF *est* TO MY THEOLOGY

A Professional Project
Presented to the Faculty
The School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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ABSTRACT

This project explores the contribution of *est* (Erhard Seminars Training) to my ongoing search for a personal theology and style of ministry, as reflected in my theology and preaching. The *est* experience took me beyond thinking about theology to a confrontation of the barriers between myself and an experience of my fundamental relatedness with God. Since then these barriers gradually have been dissolving. The project is the result of my active participation in *est* and in the church, and reflection and discussion on that participation.

Five and a half years ago Werner Erhard had a "direct experience of Self" which transformed his life. This is the Self beyond ego, mind, and feelings and is the source of these. Some of his friends noticed the change, and asked him to share his experience with them so that they could have the same benefits in their lives that he was having. He created the *est* training. The over 100,000 people who have now graduated from this two weekend training almost unanimously report an expanded experience of love, health, happiness, satisfaction, joy, and Self expression in their lives. There is nothing to learn, remember, or believe in order to have these results. *est* is about *how* we know, not about *what* we know. Many people report a deepened experience of their religious faith as a result of taking the *est* training. While *est* is not a religion, its purpose and results are aligned with Christ's purpose for us to have life in all its fullness (John 10:10 NEB).

In the *est* training, I was given an environment in which to examine my own life as I never had. I discovered that my life was controlled by a fear that I was fundamentally unacceptable--to God, others, and myself. I also discovered that it was the fear itself that kept me from experiencing my basic relatedness to God. I saw that discovering who I really am is a process of personal crucifixion and resurrection to new life. We must surrender everything to God--even the belief that we are saved sinners--if we are to have the experience of being children of God as our basic identity. The same activities done in the context of alienation from God produce very different results in the context of being God's children. Christ calls us to a full realization of our nature as children of God in lives of service.

Preaching is not only the communication of ideas about God. It should create a safe environment in which people can examine their own lives, discover their failings and wrongdoings, confess them, and let go of them, in order to commit themselves to living as God's children; the sermon should support people in living the new life in the Spirit. The three sermons in this project allow people to examine their beliefs about salvation, their judgments of others, and their willingness to serve.

I am convinced that *est* has much to offer people in the Church. This reflection on my *est* experience has illumined my purpose as a minister, which is to facilitate people in having an experience of themselves as children of God and to support them in living their lives out of this context.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Doctor of Ministry Professional Project is to show the integration of the student's seminary education as a preparation for the parish ministry. Much of my seminary experience has involved a search for a theology by which I could understand my purpose as a minister in today's world. In September, 1975, I took the *est*¹ training. The experience I had there was unlike anything I had experienced previously, and I knew immediately that it would have a great influence on my approach to ministry. Since taking the *est* training over a year and a half ago, I have been active in many graduate programs offered by *est*. This project is about the influence of *est* on my theology and preaching, rather than a study of *est* itself.

PERSONAL BIASES

The *est* experience is one of several major influences on my theology and concept of ministry, including my personal religious background, the emphasis on "abundant life" found in the Gospel of John, and the letters of Paul concerning "living in Christ" right now.

¹"*est*" is the official trademark for *est*, an educational corporation. The trademark is always in the lower case, even at the beginning of a sentence. To make it clear that this is a trademark referring exclusively to the services and organization of *est*, an educational corporation, the trademark will be typed in *italic* throughout this paper. Also, the term "the training" refers in this paper to the *est* standard training.

Personal Religious Background

Until I was in college, church meant little more to me than other social clubs to which my family belonged. In college I became involved with a campus evangelical Christian group, people whose faith was alive and central in their lives. I experienced their joy and aliveness, but my enthusiasm for the group was dampened by their rigid interpretation of Scripture and their disregard for modern Biblical scholarship. I was also uncomfortable with their emphasis on Christianity as only an escape from damnation in the next life.

It was freeing for me to discover in seminary that I did not have to deny the insights and tools of modern scholarship in order to be a Christian. Among liberal theologians I found a more intellectually sound faith. However, I did not find the same spirit of joy and Christian identity that I had valued in the evangelical group. I was frustrated in my desire to share my experience of new life in Christ in a way that made sense to me and would inspire others to open themselves to this new life also.

Scriptural Biases

I read and value the whole Bible. In the New Testament I find that at this point in my life the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul speak to me more strongly than other passages. This influence is felt throughout my theology and style of ministry and should therefore be acknowledged openly.

The Gospel of John. The Gospel of John differs from the Synoptic Gospels in its theological emphasis, its style, and its chronology of the life of Jesus. This has caused many scholars to question it as a theological source, reasoning that it might be less historically reliable than the Synoptics. It therefore has not played a major role in the quest for authentic teachings of Jesus.

However, none of the Gospels was written as a strictly historical account of the life of Jesus. They were written (as John puts it) in order "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."² The Gospels are all theological works struggling with the question of the importance of the life of Jesus, primarily to convince others of that importance and only secondarily to give data about his life. Mark is written to encourage the early Church at Rome through a time of persecution. Matthew writes from a Jewish point of view and emphasizes the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scripture. Luke puts the ministry of Jesus into more historical perspective by adding the Acts of the Apostles as a second volume to the Gospel. John is more openly theological; it opens with the pre-existent Word becoming flesh, and the book is filled with long discourses more suited to scholars than a Galilean preacher.

The Synoptic Gospels speak of the "kingdom of God" with some frequency, while it is scarcely mentioned in John. Instead, John reports Jesus as offering living water, the bread of life, being

³Jn. 20:31

born again, the life abundant, and the opportunity to become children of God. John sums up Jesus' ministry and mission: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."³ The New English Bible translates: "and have it in all its fullness." Even "eternal life" in John seems to be more a quality of present life in Christ than an exclusive reference to life after death. It is this emphasis on the abundant life in the present which Christ offers us that attracts me to the Gospel of John.

As a part of the language of eschatology current in Jesus' time, the "kingdom of God" points to a future fulfillment. Yet even in the Synoptics the kingdom of God seems also to refer to a new quality of life which might be enjoyed in the present through relationship with Jesus. The kingdom is ushered in by the ministry of Jesus, even though it exists in the present only as a seed which has yet to blossom fully. The seed having been planted, we are called to celebrate the founding of the kingdom as a present reality. The act is complete in itself; all that remains is the unfolding of it in the world. Jesus invites us to participate in a new relationship with God in the present as well as in the future. Now is the time for us to repent and begin to live new lives worthy of that kingdom. In Jesus the kingdom is so real, so close at hand, that we may enter it or exclude ourselves from it on the basis of our relationship with him. Thus, it seems to me that the Gospel of John, although different in emphasis, is not unsupported at this point by the Synoptic interpretations of Jesus.

³Jn. 10:10

The letters of Paul. While Paul looked forward to leaving this life to "be with Christ,"⁴ the bulk of his writing is dedicated to the practical everyday business of "living in the Spirit" or "living in Christ" in the present. He writes about the conduct of one's business affairs, diet, sex life, worship, etc. as well as about the results to be expected, the fruit of the Spirit.⁵ While John and Paul differ on some points, they seem to be in agreement that the blessings of following Christ are available to all who follow and that those blessings are manifested in this present life. Paul's "life in the Spirit" and John's "abundant life" seem to me to refer to the same experience. I find Paul's emphasis on the fruits of the Spirit in this life compelling.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT WITH *est*

Because this project is a discussion of the contribution of *est* to my theology, most of my research has been my personal involvement with *est*, plus discussion and reflection on that involvement and its effects on my life and ministry.

It has been over a year and a half since I first walked into the training, skeptical that it could produce the miracles I had heard claimed for it by enthusiastic graduates. I was particularly doubtful

⁴Phil. 1:23

⁵"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." Gal:22-23

that it would work for me, since it was basically for highly emotional people or those who had real problems and needed help. To my surprise the two weekends of the *est* training transformed my life. The first week after completing the training a childhood nightmare lost its power to haunt me and I started losing weight. The value that I have received from the training was immediate and has continued expanding since that time.

While the training is complete in itself and no further participation in the organization is necessary to maintain the results of the training, there are further opportunities for participation in the *est* environment available (See page 21). I have completed three graduate seminar series, the three "Making Relationships Work" courses and a Communication Workshop held especially for members of the clergy. I have spent many evenings in guest seminars and special events. I attended an event in San Francisco called "An Evening with the Clergy," during which Werner Erhard, the founder of *est*, discussed his understanding of the relationship between *est* and religion.

Probably the most valuable involvement in *est* for me since the training has been my participation in the assistants program, including completion of the demanding Guest Seminar Leaders Program. *est* devotes a great deal of time and attention to the development of the assistants to greater levels of ethics, responsibility and leadership.

THE CHURCH AND *est*

est creates an environment in which each participant examines his/her own life, and most people come out of the training thinking

that *est* is whatever they are personally involved in. For example, a feminist might view the training as being primarily concerned with feminist philosophy and experience. While I am clear that *est* is not a religion, my understanding of the training is a religious one. My experience of Christianity also has been transformed as a result of my personal transformation during the training.

It seems to me that the purpose of *est* is aligned with the purpose of Christianity. The Church offers new life through Christ; *est* offers personal transformation. In the *est* training people observe their barriers to having life work in such a way that those barriers begin to dissolve. Since taking the *est* training I have discovered that my purpose as a minister is to create the space for people to experience themselves as children of God and to support them in living life in that context.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used throughout this paper as defined. Unless footnoted to that effect, the terms are not exact *est* definitions.

Abundant life: The dictionary defines *abundant* as "plentiful, in great quantity, fully sufficient." *Abundant life* implies a fullness of life, lacking nothing to make it whole. It includes the *est* definition of *aliveness* (see below), as well as St. Paul's definition of the fruits of the Spirit ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self control" Gal.5:22) and "the peace which passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

Aliveness: Usually defined at *est* as love, health, happiness and full Self expression. Implies fulfillment and satisfaction.

Assist: *Assist* implies aid given to one who is able and imputes no inferiority to the person aided. *Help*, in contrast, implies the subordination or dependence of the person being aided. The hockey illustration is a good one: a person *assists* by passing the puck to a team member in a position to score.

Barrier: That which stands in the way of fully realizing or experiencing that which is actually there, that which is true for the person. *Barriers* are generally unacknowledged wrongdoings and perpetrations.

Born again: A person who has gone through the process of having his/her life *transformed* rather than *changed* (see page 43); a Self realized *child of God* (see below). People can change their lives: only God can transform lives. Paul expressed this in the image of dying with Christ and rising again to "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Being *born again* implies dying completely to an old way of life so that there is nothing left, and being re-born out of that experience of nothing as a new being in Christ. A person *born again* lives in the Spirit as a child of God.

Child of God: Ultimately, everyone is a *child of God*. However, I use it in a more specific sense as an identifying name for one whose life is lived within the context of the full, inseparable relationship with God that undergirds all of existence. A *child of God* in this sense is one who has realized his/her identity through and in this relationship with God, rather than any other notion that might be added to this fundamental identity.

Considerations: All the reasons for or against doing something; anything that is considered in making a *decision* (see page 47).

Context: That within which something is held; that which determines the limitations of the existence of something. For example, a bowl is the *context* of the soup. Specifically, *context* in this paper refers to the largest "bowl" out of which one lives one's life; the limits which cannot be penetrated. The ultimate *context* is *God* (see below); usually we live in a "bowl" smaller than the experience of relationship with *God*.

Getting it: This refers to having an *experience* (see page 31) of the answer to a riddle or a problem or a statement. We *understand* an intellectual idea; we *get* the *experience*. It is the distinction between understanding a joke and getting the joke. In the *est* training *getting it* also refers to the moment of *transformation* (see page 33).

Getting off it: Realizing that one is stuck in a restrictive position or point of view and being willing to let go of having to be right about it.

God: The Creator or Source of everything that is and the *context* within which everything exists.

Graduate: Refers to a person who has completed the two weekends of the *est* training.

Life in the Spirit: Life is based on the foundation of one's relationship with God rather than on rules or beliefs about how life should be. It implies the willingness to look into the mirror of Jesus and acknowledge the truth about oneself. It entails sacrifice of one's past life and being attuned to the Spirit of God within.

Perpetration: a breach of ethics; a wrongdoing.

Purpose: *Purpose* is a direction in life which is endless. An image used at *est* is having the *purpose* of going east. No matter how far east one travels, there is always more east to go. If one went as far east as possible, a person would end up in the exact spot from which s/he set out. Thus, *purpose*, in addition to being the direction, is always fully realized and unattainable.

Goals are measurable end points along the direction of *purpose*. *Goals* are attainable. *Goals* are a way to correct one's course, indicating if one is *on purpose*. For example, if one's *purpose* is going east, starting from Los Angeles with the *goal* of reaching New York City and one finds oneself in Seattle, it is a good indication that one is *off purpose*. This realization will enable a person to include Seattle in the *purpose* by once more heading east, this time from Seattle.

Responsibility:

"*Responsibility* starts with the willingness to acknowledge that you are cause in a matter.

It starts with the willingness to deal with a situation from and with the point of view, *whether at the moment realized or not*, that you are the source of what you are, what you do and what you have. This point of view extends to include even what is done to you and ultimately what another does to another.

Responsibility is not fault, praise, blame, shame or guilt. All these include judgments and evaluations of good and bad, right and wrong, or better and worse. They are not responsibility as they are all beyond a simple acknowledgement that you are cause in your own experience."

⁹Werner Erhard, "Definition of Responsibility" (seminar handout, 1976).

Self/self: The *Self* is that which is beyond the mind, emotions or ego. It is that which is the source or context of one's life. It flows out of relationship with God with no barriers to the realization of that relationship.

The *self* is the personal point of view, the life story, the ego, mind, emotions, physical body, etc. The *self* exists within the *Self*. It is, in fact, the manifestation of the *Self* within the physical universe. To the extent that we are living as children of God we are expressing *Self* in the world.

Sin/sinner: *Sin* is a wrongdoing, an evil, which leads to alienation from God. *Sin* carries the connotation of guilt and alienation whereas *wrongdoing* implies no judgment.

A *sinner* is a person whose life revolves around *sin*, whose life is lived within the context of alienation.

Trainee: a participant in the *est* training who has not yet completed the program.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS *est* ?

The *est* experience generates as many opinions, ideas, assumptions and evaluations as there are people who have heard of it. Most people compare the training to some other discipline with which they are familiar. However, *est* is its own unique experience. Werner says,

est is not like group therapy, sensitivity training, encounter, positive thinking, meditation, hypnosis, mind control, behavior modification, religion, or anything else you might think of. It is not therapy and it is not psychology.¹

The training was put together out of Werner's experience as a way of sharing a life-transforming experience he had with others who wanted to have the same experience. The training has its own unique and specific purpose. While the benefits of the training vary from individual to individual, in general graduates experience an expanded sense of health, happiness, love and Self expression.

The *est* training is a two-weekend experience complete in itself. There is nothing one must do after the two weekends to continue having the results of the training. There are also many opportunities for those who wish to continue their participation with *est* after completing the training.

In the training people look at their beliefs. The training is not about *what* you believe, but about how you *hold* your beliefs, about

¹Werner Erhard, "The Relationship Between *est* and Religion, Psychotherapy and Other Disciplines," Information about *est* (information for media requests, San Francisco, 1976), p. 1.

how you know what you know. In the training one can also examine the context in which s/he holds religion. While *est* is not religion, it can enhance an individual's experience of his/her religious tradition, and it can contribute to a religion's ability to deliver on the religion's promises.

BACKGROUND

The Beginning of *est*

est was created by Werner Erhard. As founder of *est* Werner is credentialed only by his genius and by his results. His formal education ended with high school. He worked in a variety of jobs, mainly in what he calls "executive motivation," the motivation of managers and salespeople to produce greater results. In a search for satisfaction in his own life, Werner became a "discipline freak;" that is, he invested all his free time in exploring disciplines and programs promising awareness, enlightenment or personal growth. He would master a program to the degree that he was qualified to be an instructor in it. During this time he had a "peak experience" which lasted for about three months. His life was filled with love, peace, joy, satisfaction: life worked perfectly. And then the experience disappeared.

Werner spent the next eight years trying to get it back, to no avail. Nothing worked. He tried everything. There was absolutely no hope. Out of that experience of despair and surrender he had what he describes as "a direct experience of myself." Everything fell into place as he was in touch with the experience of Self. As a result the quality of his life was visibly transformed.

People around Werner noticed this new quality of his life, and they wanted to have the same experience and results in their own lives. So Werner put together a workshop for a few dozen friends, creating for them an environment in which they could experience the same transformation that he had himself. These first friends of Werner had their own friends and relatives who wanted to do the training. Now, five and a half years later there are over 100,000 *est* graduates, all as a result of graduates sharing their experience. (There is no advertising, except public notices that events are sold out.)

Purpose and Results of the Training

The purpose of the *est* training is clearly stated in the *est* literature and guest seminars (introductory meetings for persons interested in the training):

The purpose of the *est* training is to transform your ability to experience living, so that the situations you have been trying to change or have been putting up with clear up just in the process of life itself.²

As a result of this experience of transformation, the graduates overwhelmingly report more "aliveness," that is, more love, health, happiness, fuller Self expression, satisfaction and fulfillment. They are more aware of how they relate to themselves and the people and things around them than they were previously. According to one study of *est* graduates:

Respondents reported most changes in: general physical health; mental health; missing work due to illness; headache and migraine;

²"What is the purpose of the *est* training?" (seminar handout, 1976).

hypertension; sleep difficulties; drug usages including pain medication, sleeping medication, tranquilizers, psychoactive drugs, and other prescription and non-prescription drugs; alcohol consumption; energy level; satisfaction with work; relationships with significant others; meaningfulness of life; allergies, acne, weight problems, colds, sore throats and sinus problems; dysmenorrhea; gastrointestinal problems such as ulcers, colitis, indigestion, diarrhea, constipation and gas; back pain, neck and shoulder pain; genitourinary complaints; cigarette and marijuana smoking; nervous habits; memory problems; sexual difficulties; and fear of doctors.²

est carefully points out that the training is not something people need. We need food, clothes, shelter and someone to love. We do not need *est*. What *est* has to offer is an expanded experience of the love, health, happiness and Self expression already present in our lives. After the training, the true Self, the totally perfect, loving, ethical, responsible potential of each person begins to manifest itself more clearly in the world, and the problems, limitations and upsets of a person's life begin to clear up in direct proportion.

I see in the purpose and results of *est* total alignment with what I perceive to be Christ's purpose, stated most succinctly in John 10:10: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

While *est* is not a replacement for the Church, it is a place in which some persons have experienced the opening of their lives to God. The *est* training facilitated tremendous spiritual growth for me personally by providing an environment which supported my observing and taking responsibility for the barriers and limitations which I had erected knowingly and unknowingly between myself and the abundant life which flows out of relationship with God. Since then my relationship with

³Dr. Robert Ornstein, "*est* Outcome Study" (letter to *est* graduates, March 15, 1976), p. 2.

God and my experience of that abundant life have continued to expand as I also experience myself and my willingness to have my barriers dissolve--just in the process of life itself.

STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING

The *est* training is a four-day experience that takes place on two consecutive weekends, 9 a.m. to approximately midnight each day. There is a certain amount of material to be covered each day, and the training continues until the result for the day has been produced. There are three optional midweek seminars of three hours each, the pre-training, mid-training and post-training. The tuition for the training is \$300, with a \$250 scholarship generally extended to clergy serving congregations.⁴ Trainings are usually held in hotel ballrooms with the chairs arranged theater-style. There are approximately 250 trainees per training, one trainer and a logistics team.

Three things happen in the training: data, processes and sharing. The environment is carefully controlled logistically to eliminate interruptions or distractions. There is no "encounter" or "touchy-feely." Within the context of the group, each trainee will have his/her own very personal and unique experience of Self.

⁴At "An Evening with the Clergy" (*est* seminar, San Francisco, November 12, 1975) Werner explained that this scholarship is his way of acknowledging the contribution members of the clergy make to the aliveness of people. Inquiries about the scholarship should be directed to Don Cox, President of *est*, 765 California Street, San Francisco CA 94108.

The training provides a totally secure environment for each person physically, emotionally and socially to have this experience.

One graduate described his experience of this approach as follows:

Unlike meditational approaches, a trainee is kept with and aware of the presence of, other people but unlike interactional approaches the trainee is not spoken to or confronted by anyone.⁵ What this produces is all of the typical reactions, feelings, and perceptions of the others but in a situation where a person's typical patterns of responding are not automatically evoked. What happens then is that the person has a truly unique opportunity to look at exactly what is going on in terms of their own experience. Someone who becomes anxious with others and avoids this through sarcastic put-downs and powerplays is, in the *est* training, left simply with their experience of anxiety--perhaps, consciously, for the first time in their adult lives.⁶

The Data

The data introduced by the trainer is a body of information designed to assist each person in considering his/her own points of view and beliefs. The data serve as a springboard for personal observation rather than as something to be believed or remembered. Werner comments about the data:

The trainer presents data that allows trainees to look at, become aware of, and examine their established beliefs--especially their beliefs of who they think they are, who they are afraid they are, who they are trying to be and who they are trying not to be. While doing so they have the opportunity to become aware of their mechanical and automatic patterns of thinking and behavior. The data in the training is addressed not to what one thinks, feels,

⁵No one is singled out for criticism or confrontation; however, anyone who wishes to speak directly with the trainer in front of the group can raise his/her hand. (See p.18.)

⁶J. Herbert Hamsher, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Temple University, "The Relationship between *est* and Psychotherapy" (unpublished paper, 1976), Information about *est* (information packet prepared for media requests, San Francisco, 1976), pp. 2-3.

senses, perceives, does or is, but to where each of these comes from--the context in which each of these things exists.⁷

Among topics covered are sex, relationships, children, agreements, power, fear, reality, the anatomy of an experience, the anatomy of the mind, beliefs, epistemology.

Processes

A process is an inward looking with the result of release to greater spontaneity.⁸ Usually processes are done with the eyes closed, sitting in a chair, noticing whatever thoughts, images, emotions or physical sensations arise as the trainer gives instructions. A sample instruction might be "Recall the color blue" or "Recall a time when you were really happy with someone." Each person's response to the instruction will be unique to that person. Training processes are carefully designed each with a specific purpose as a building block for the following process. The instructions are like tiny hooks to bring up the appropriate experience for each person. Processes last from 45 minutes to four hours. Each process is carefully explained beforehand and several hours may be spent answering questions before the process begins. A few processes are done with the eyes open or with the trainee standing or lying on the floor. Werner comments:

Ordinarily when you think about an experience you are looking for the effect that it had--how it turned out, what it did, or what

⁷Werner Erhard, "What is *est*?", Information about *est*, 1976, p. 17.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 18.

happened. That consists of *thinking* about *symbols* of your experience toward their *effect*. A process is a state of awareness in which you are not thinking about or figuring out or looking at your experience, but actually are *experiencing* your *experience* toward the *source* of the experience.⁹

Sharing

All *sharing* is directed to the trainer. An individual who wishes to ask a question or relate a problem, an insight into a recurring life pattern or perhaps an experience of the previous process will raise his/her hand, be given a microphone and stand up and speak so that the entire group can hear. Afterwards the group acknowledges the person's willingness to share of him/herself and to contribute to the group. The clapping does not imply approval of what has been said; it is an acknowledgement of the sharing of oneself.

When someone asks a question about the data, the trainer will talk with that person individually until s/he has no further question about what is meant. The trainer does not solve people's problems. Rather, s/he enables the person to get in touch with that person's own ability to solve his/her own problems and to tell the truth. The trainer does not judge or evaluate. An individual will say that s/he hates the trainer/loves the trainer; s/he thinks what is happening is stupid/is the most wonderful thing ever. In each case the trainer's response will be "Thank you for sharing your experience, I got it." Each person's experience is valued for its intrinsic worth as the person's experience.

⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

Agreements

A major element in the construction of the safe environment of the training is the agreements or ground rules by which each trainee agrees to abide. On the first morning anyone who cannot accept the ground rules is given the opportunity to leave with a full refund. These ground rules allow each person to experience the training without being interrupted or impinged upon by other persons. The ground rules also allow the trainees to discover experientially the condition of their level of ethics.

The ground rules are straightforward. They include being in the room while the training is going on; smoking or eating only during the designated breaks (Bathroom breaks are scheduled every four to five hours); abstaining from drugs, including aspirin and alcohol, for the two weeks of the training (except those which a doctor says a person must take). Trainees agree to take the empty seat that is front-most and center-most, not to sit next to someone they knew prior to the training, not to take notes, not to whisper. They agree to raise their hands when they wish to share. They agree to allow each other to each have his/her own experience, that whatever experience comes up is all right for each other to have.

There has been some controversy about the "rigorous" agreements of the training and about the unsmiling confrontation by staff and assistants that accompanies broken agreements by the trainees. Werner responds to the question about why the training is so "one-way":

The answer is simple. It got clear to me about five years ago that the rules in life, in the physical universe, don't bend. If I fall down, gravity doesn't say, 'There, there, Werner, I'm going to relax my rules a little bit for you the next time so you won't fall so hard.'

So I thought it important, if people were to have an opportunity to discover themselves, to provide a stable environment that they couldn't con into changing. The result is that the *est* staff and assistants who supervise the training and handle the physical aspects of the room do things consistently one way. They go by the book. That is not to say that I think you should follow a book of rules all the time. In fact, I don't have any 'rules for life.' It is, however, important to know that the physical universe *always* goes by the book; gravity does not give a damn about your feelings. If you fall down and hurt yourself, the rules stay exactly the same. As a reminder of that the training is done in an unyielding manner.¹⁰

Space

The *est* training is a *safe space*; that is, it is an environment in which it is safe to look at one's life. In *est* usage, *space* is the context in which you look at your experience. When you are sitting in a process with your eyes closed looking at your experience, you are "in your space."

The training is kept physically secure by the logistics staff and the training supervisor so that the trainer and the trainees can have their full attention on doing the training, rather than on their physical surroundings. The logistics team sets up chairs, handles microphones, water, room security, etc.

The space is also created by the agreement of the trainees to let everyone have his/her own experience. During any given process some

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

people may be bored, others laughing, some crying, some screaming, a few throwing up, several falling asleep. One is not required to display wild emotion, nor to share anything nor to suppress anything. Whatever memory, emotion, physical sensation or thought surfaces is what is appropriate for the person at that moment. If a person is unwilling to confront an experience, her/his mind will wander off into sleep. This too is appropriate. Trainees are instructed to "follow the instructions and take what you get."

The trainees are also safe in their relationship with the trainer. During the entire 60 hours of my training I never saw the trainer respond to a person with anything other than that which would serve and support that person. If someone needed gentleness and encouragement, s/he got it. If s/he needed explanation, the trainer would take as long with that person as was necessary to achieve clarity. If the person was "dumping" on the group, refusing to be responsible for him/herself, the trainer would point that out. If necessary the trainer might shout. There was a meticulousness in the trainer's relationship with the group and meticulous attention to detail in the physical set up. No one had to tell me that I was considered a person worthy of first class treatment: *est* demonstrated it.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUING PARTICIPATION AT *est*

No practice, belief or participation in the *est* organization is necessary for the results of the training to continue to expand in a person's life. Graduates who choose not to continue participating

after the two-weekend training report the same continuing benefits as those who do continue in the *est* environment.¹¹ For those who wish to speed up their expansion or who simply like being with others who have shared the *est* experience, there is a variety of programs available at minimal cost.

Graduate Program

The graduate program includes workshops, courses, seminar series, special events, public service projects, and the opportunity to review the training. Werner creates new programs as the graduates demand them.

Guest Program

The graduates demanded a facility for their friends and relatives to find out about the training, so Werner created guest seminars in a variety of forms. There are small guest seminars of 15-40 guests, coffee guest seminars in graduates' homes, and huge celebratory events of several thousand graduates and guests.

Assistants Program

The assistants program was developed out of Werner's observation that everyone wants the opportunity to participate and to make a contribution:

¹¹Ornstein, p. 3.

One of the ways you can recognize people who don't know who they are is that they think that when they realize themselves, it cuts them off from other people...When you have experienced yourself, when you have truly experienced enlightenment, you will know it because it will take you out into the world. Not into a cave. Not into a monastery. But out into the world. And the way you go into the world is with compassion. Being out in the world is compassion itself...The experience of self takes you out into the world to serve others.¹²

The assistants program has been put together with the same care that characterizes the training. It is designed to serve those who serve. Assistants are nurtured by their participation, and as soon as an assistant has demonstrated an ability and a willingness to handle greater responsibility, s/he is offered that opportunity. Thus an assistant is constantly experiencing growth, challenge and satisfaction. An assistant agrees to get more value from the program than s/he contributes. If s/he does not, s/he agrees to quit assisting. One generally makes a 12-week assisting agreement, usually three hours per week, and then takes a minimum of one month "vacation." Anyone who uses the assisting agreement as an excuse for the rest of his/her life not working (e.g. financial or marital conflicts) is asked to quit assisting until s/he has handled his/her personal life. The program is designed to support the assistant's life, not to be a problem. There are special training programs available only to assistants, as an acknowledgement of their contribution to *est*. As of October, 1976, over the course of a year's time there were 170 *est* graduates on the paid staff and about 10,000 unpaid assistants who volunteered their

¹²Erhard, "*est*'s Public Service Activities," Information about *est*, 1976, p. 1.

time over the course of a year.¹³ In some centers there are waiting lists of people who want to assist.

The spontaneous desire to serve, to contribute and to participate is the source of evangelism and social action in the church as well. One indication that the church is not presently aligned with its purpose is the quality of church volunteer activity, which often seems to be accompanied by a sense of duty, guilt, resentment and sacrifice, rather than joy, enthusiasm and satisfaction.

BELIEFS

One of the areas of life that people observe closely in the training is their beliefs. The beliefs with which the training deals primarily are the beliefs we have about ourselves which we do not even recognize as beliefs. For example, before the training I believed that I had to have eight hours of sleep and three meals a day in order to function properly. I believed that I could not participate in rigorous physical activity because of my flat feet. In the training I discovered that these unexamined beliefs were literally my masters. I found that I had allowed myself only to experience those things which fit my beliefs.

The Three Persons that Compose an Individual

Werner has the notion that there are three persons in each of

¹³"The *est* Organization," Information about *est*, 1976, p. 1;
 "The *est* Graduate Participation Program," *ibid.*, p. 5.

us: who we pretend to be, who we are afraid we are, and who we truly are.

Who I pretend to be. This is the person I present to the world. My act, or presentation, is the collection of the many roles I play in life: husband, friend, student, minister, hermit, victim, hero.

Who I am afraid I am. Under the pretense is the person I am afraid I am. Often how I act in the world, how I relate to people and things around me, is controlled by the person I am afraid I am. I always have to have the answer, because the person I am afraid of being is stupid. I always have to be *right* because I am afraid that who I truly am is basically evil.

Who I really am. Beneath the first two persons is who I truly am, a totally able, totally responsible, and totally loving being. To have that experience of myself I have to confront and go through the discomfort of my pretenses and fears.

Survival Mechanism

Beliefs are generally used as justifications for our pretenses and fears. For example: "I am not popular at parties because I am special: I like to be alone and read, *and it is better to be smart than popular anyway.*" My belief is a way for me to suppress my upset so that I do not have to experience my pain of failure and rejection directly and fully. Since I am not willing to be responsible for being

the source of my feelings, I trade my experience of myself for a belief. Gradually I numb myself to experience altogether, spending my life in automatic behaviors held together by my justifications.

The survival of who I believe I am then depends on my continued belief; my mind will reinterpret or totally suppress anything which does not fit my beliefs. For example, if I believe that my father does not love me, no matter what he does to demonstrate his love for me, I will not be able to experience that love. My whole life will be spent in proving to myself that I was right. I will construct other beliefs to support that belief: if my father does not love me, then no one else could love me either. I will keep everyone else out of my life also. This will reinforce my belief that I am different, that I am special. Eventually my whole life becomes a web of beliefs and justifications. All of the sorrow and the grief will still be there, unacknowledged, suppressed under my compulsion to be right. I will have surrendered my experience of myself, my experience of joy and aliveness, in exchange for escape from discomfort, for the anesthetic of my beliefs.

In the training these unexamined beliefs and the experiences the beliefs are designed to suppress are confronted, and the original incidents are experienced. The attendant discomfort that prompted the original suppression may also be experienced. When the original incident is re-experienced, the upset and the associated mechanical patterns begin to dissolve, and more of the Self, who I really am, begins to be expressed.

Experiences Inconsistent with Beliefs

Various demonstrations in the training are presented as a way of breaking through the stranglehold of beliefs:

The trainer is presenting facts that are inconsistent with the way people believe the world to be. By the end of the first day you will have seen for yourself--and more importantly, experienced for yourself--things which you believe cannot happen. Yet there they are; they did happen. So you begin to question *believing* as a way of knowing.¹⁴

Disappearing headaches. One of the experiences which did not fit into my beliefs about myself was the demonstration of my ability to free myself from a headache in a matter of seconds. Before the training I had frequent headaches which often stopped me from participating. In the training I uncovered my natural ability to rid myself of pain, and I very rarely have headaches at all any more.

Personality Profile demonstration. Another natural ability in which I did not believe was demonstrated in the Personality Profile. This is an expression of one's innate ability to fully experience a person one has never met and who is not present in the room. At the graduation each trainee experiences his/her own ability to do this successfully. More than once I have described a person to members of his/her family as accurately as they could have described that person. New graduates of the training who have never met me often have related to my wife my own interests, inner conflicts and relationships with greater clarity than I could have!

¹⁴ Erhard, "What Is *est*?", *ibid.*, p. 9.

The effect of challenge to belief. Werner comments on the effect of such challenges as disappearing pain and the Personality Profile to one's belief system within the context of the training environment:

Usually, such a challenge makes you start looking for defensive weapons. In the training, however, you do not need to defend yourself. You are given a safe space in which you can *watch* yourself respond, and thus get in touch with the source of your experience in life...

In other words, *you* are not under attack, even though your belief systems are.¹⁵

Religious Beliefs

Religious beliefs are rarely discussed in the training except as they come up in people's questions. Werner has said that our *belief* about God is our greatest barrier to *experiencing* God.¹⁶ Beliefs cannot produce an experience, since beliefs are only a survival mechanism. All one can do with a belief is to defend it. When I *believe* in God, my loyalty is attached to my belief rather than to my actual experience of encounter with God. Since God is infinitely greater than any definition or belief I could devise, belief is a barrier between me and my experience of God.

During the training I was able to let go of my barriers and resistance to incidents and concepts presented in the Bible that I had formerly blindly believed and did not experience, or which I

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Statement made in author's training.

disbelieved.¹⁷ The New Testament suddenly came alive for me. I experienced the log in my own eye, and as it disappeared I discovered that the speck in my brother's was not the monstrosity I had judged it. Heavy laden, I gave up burdens I had carried for over 20 years. I watched others surrender their guilt, resentments, sorrows and failures, and I saw their faces lighten up so dramatically that I wondered if demons had been physically cast out. I discovered that the miracles and the impossible demands of Jesus were not poetry and metaphor: I no longer had to believe or resist believing; these miracles are now the truth in my experience.

Believing in *est*

After the training a person still has beliefs, still tries to make him/herself right and others wrong (even though the tyranny of belief has been broken). Some graduates use their *est* experience to justify their actions and to add weight to their beliefs. Werner is particularly interested in not turning *est* into one more belief:

Talk about belief systems and enlightenment can get holy and pompous, which of course traps it in a belief system that people have about significance. One reason I am often irreverent when I work with people is that I want to keep them from making what I say significant and stuffing it into some belief system...

The point is not to substitute one belief system for another. It is to be responsible for having created the belief system in the first place, so that it doesn't control you...

¹⁷ It became clear in the training that disbelief is a form of belief: disbelief is a changed belief. (See p. 43).

...believing in *est* is like believing in anything else. If you turn what the trainer says into rules, you will block your experience of yourself.¹⁸

est AS EPISTEMOLOGY

Everything we know about our world we know through either the intellectual/logical/conceptual mode or the intuitive/feeling/sensing mode. The training does not come out of or contribute to either of these modes per se. The training is essentially epistemology: it is about *how* we know rather than about *what* we know. Werner reflects on the contribution of *est* in this area:

Most disciplines have technique and content. They have things and ideas they want to give you that they think are worthwhile. We don't have any ideas or techniques we think are worthwhile. It is our experience that *you* are worthwhile and it has been our observation that, when you actually experience your self rather than who you think you are (your mind, your ego, your feelings, etc.) you will experience that, in fact, you are worthwhile already and you will begin to express your worth naturally without any discipline and without any precepts and without any beliefs.

What is perhaps unique to *est* is that, unlike most disciplines *est* is not an attempt to expand or utilize the intellectual/logical/conceptual mode of knowing, nor is it an attempt to get you in touch with the intuitive/feeling/sensing mode of knowing. Actually both of these modes are held by a self, which transcends both of them, and it is the self which experiences.¹⁹

Epistemological Model

An image often used to describe the shift in consciousness that results from the training is that of a fish in water. A fish cannot

¹⁸ Erhard, "What Is *est*?", op. cit., pp. 10-12.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

experience water because it is totally surrounded by water. Water is the context of its existence. The *est* training is about the fish jumping out of the water. Once the fish has experienced, even for an instant, "not-water," its experience of water will be forever transformed. For a person this means stepping outside of one's mind and experiencing a moment of detachment in which one can observe that s/he *has* a mind, and thereafter s/he cannot continue to assume s/he *is* his/her mind. One experiences oneself as the context of the mind.

During the "Evening with the Clergy," Werner illustrated this with the following diagram:²⁰

III	II	I
GENERATING PRINCIPLES	"EXPERIENCE"	SYMBOL
EXPERIENCE	SENSATION	MEMORY
SOURCE	PERCEPTION	BELIEF
That which has no time or form but which exists as the source of sensation and is not sensation.		CONCEPT
There is no name for this.		STORY

Columns I and II represent a closed system of perception and belief, the way we organize our life. I-II is a self-contained system. III represents the context in which the I-II system of the mind is held.

²⁰ Personal notes taken at "An Evening with the Clergy" (*est* seminar, San Francisco, Nov. 12, 1975). Used with permission of *est*.

The Mind

The mind is the collector and interpreter of our sensations and perceptions, in effect, a computer. This computer is essential to our survival in a physical world. For example, my sense organs send the message to my brain that there is a wall ahead. My mind scans all the records of previous encounters with walls and signals my brain to direct my body through the door instead of directing me through the wall.

The mind is also a survival mechanism which combines data that it associates with survival. If I once survived a skiing accident, my mind may associate having broken legs with survival, and I may thereafter create a series of accidents in my life in order to survive similar situations that may remind my mind of that skiing accident. The trigger might be something as superficial as a smell or sound that happened in the background in the moments leading up to the accident.

The mind will also selectively perceive and interpret data if the sensory input threatens a belief which is necessary for the survival of who I think I am. (Thoughts are a mind function.) For example, if my perception of myself involves a belief that my father does not love me, my mind will continue to prove to me that my belief is justified. There is no possibility of new input within the I-II closed system. Everything we perceive triggers memories and survival mechanisms and we spend our lives mechanically re-enacting early childhood incidents. We "get stuck acting the way we were instead of being the way we are."²¹

²¹"What is the purpose of the *est* training?", p. 1.

The training is designed to let one fully grasp the implications of living within this I-II system. It is hopeless. There is no way out of a closed system. I am trapped. I experience my mind directly and I discover the truth which I have suppressed above all others: I am a machine. Everyone is a machine. Everything we do is merely the effect of some previous incident and survival mechanisms. In the instant that I see this and give up hope that I will ever be more than a machine, the transformation happens. I experience that who I really am is not a machine: I am the one who creates and observes the machinery. I am not my mind; I have a mind.

Context

Column III in the diagram is not a separate and equivalent column, but the context in which I and II exist. It might be thought of as the whole sheet of paper that the diagram is written on. Since III is the context of the I-II system it cannot be believed, since belief exists only within the I-II system. In order to experience III one must get out of the I-II closed system. In fact, when one transcends the I-II system, all there is to experience is III, since III is all that there is: III is the context.

Like the fish jumping out of the water, I cannot hold onto this (or any other) experience. Anything I can hold onto is only a record or symbol of the experience, and is stored by the mind. I can, however, live moment by moment as the source of my own experience. I can take responsibility for being the source of who I am, what I do and what I have. I am the source of everything within the I-II system: the ideas,

beliefs, memories, emotions, and the story of my life.

Transformation

Since the training I hold my life in the context of being responsible for my experiences. I am able to notice my mind, and it becomes a source of interest and amusement rather than a prison warden. I notice my beliefs, my feelings, my thoughts. When I come from my experience I know that my beliefs are a way of organizing the incidents of my life. When I come from my experience I absolutely experience my father's love for me. And when I come from my experience I still find that it is appropriate for me to treat walls as solid and to walk through doors, even though I know that "walls" is a concept for organizing a collection of atoms (which are also concepts for other data).

Contribution of *est*

This understanding of reality is not new. The genius of the *est* training lies in its ability to create the space for people to have the actual experience of transcendence rather than a theory about it, and it accomplishes this in a few days. As a result of this experience people have the fruits, or as *est* puts it, the "badges" of enlightenment (transformation): love, health, happiness, joy, satisfaction and Self expression. *Source* (III) is now where a person "comes from" rather than a goal to aspire toward.

est AND CHRISTIANITY

One of the contributions *est* is making to the Church is the increased aliveness brought into the Church by the individual Christians who have taken the training and who are experiencing and sharing that new level of aliveness wherever they participate. Another contribution to the Church will be the transformation of the Church itself as it reflects the transformation of the individuals who make up the Church. A third contribution lies in the new insights that clergy may gain into how to "open the space" for people to experience transformation and aliveness more effectively than has been the case in the recent past. I include the remarks of other churchpersons as well as my own experience of the impact the *est* training on the institutional Church as a result of the individual clergy and laypersons who have taken the training. In Chapter 3 I discuss what I see as the mission of the Church, that is, rebirth to new life in Christ. This theological understanding was the result of seeing the dramatic rebirth possible through the *est* training.

Transformation of Individuals in the Church

David Jacobsen, a Presbyterian minister, found that his experience of Christianity had been totally transformed as a result of several awareness expanding experiences, including the *est* training. One result for him was that his prayers consistently were answered, which did not fit his reasonable beliefs about life. He created a Prayer Renewal Workshop which allows other people to begin to have

the certainty of answered prayer and the experience of miracles in their lives. Jacobsen discovered:

I'm willing to give up my reasonableness. As a matter of fact, I see no way in which the church can minister to the generation which is coming and remain as we were--reasonable. The notion of prayer must be confronted. There is a generation coming which is forcing the church to take another look at religion.²²

Stuart Fitch, an Episcopalian priest, says of *est*:

The *est* experience for me was a positive one, opening me to more aliveness, giving me more tools to creatively minister and teach.

The *est* training validly tries to jar us from a common religious mistake--to reduce God to words, beliefs systems and credal formularies and to pass that on as enough! What I got is our need to transcend these limiting agents (as valid as words are to map the territory and to point the directions) to the experience of God; *est* challenges us²³ to get our own experiences of God and not just buy someone else's.

Father Joseph Brendler, a professor at New Orleans' Notre Dame Seminary, shares his experience of the *est* training:

est gave me the *experience* of what theology has been *telling* me.

I am much closer to God now. I see God's relationship to us. It really doesn't matter what we do; God's love of us doesn't change. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, which I had never really understood, I identified with the long-suffering elder son and was angry at the acceptance of the younger son. Now I²⁴ see that it is O.K. for me to be this way and it doesn't matter.

²²David C. Jacobsen, Clarity in Prayer: telling the small t truth (Corte Madera, CA: Omega Books, 1976), p. 11.

²³Stuart G. Fitch, letter to the editor, The Washington Star, March 18, 1976, in Information about est, 1976, sec. g.

²⁴Interview, Adelaide Bry, est: 60 hours that transform your life (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 29-30.

Transformation of the Church as Institution

During the Evening with the Clergy, Werner discussed the promise of religion: joy, aliveness and relationship with God. He said that religions have not delivered on that promise, and he challenged us to stop trying to prove that we have the exclusively right answer and to start delivering on the promise we have for people. What does it profit us to have the right tradition if in our concern for correct doctrine no one is nurtured by their religion? If the people are nurtured by their faith there is no need to defend anything--the fruits produced will speak for themselves.

est is not a religion in that it has no specific content to pass on. *est* is concerned with the context in which the content of life is held, not with the specific content. Just as *est* assists teachers, doctors, psychotherapists and prison officials in looking at the context in which they hold the content of their professions, so *est* can assist people of all religious traditions in examining the context in which we hold the content of our particular religion.

After a year of struggling with the question of the source of the new abundance that I discovered in my life after taking the training, I realized that it did not come from *est* or from Christianity but from God. I saw that the value of the *est* experience for me was that I was able to surrender my barriers to having Christianity be a nurturing religion for me. I could claim the promise that had always been extended to me: joy, aliveness, and relationship with God.

CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION: CHILDREN OF GOD, NOT SAVED SINNERS!

Christians are called to this life. Christianity is not primarily about avoiding damnation after death. It is about having the fruits of life in the Spirit in the midst of our daily lives. We all have an act in the world which we use to hide the fact that we live our lives in the context of alienation. Christ does not call us to accept a particular belief system, but to free us from our beliefs which keep us stuck in the context of alienation. We must be born again--transformed, not merely changed. Our lives show the fruits of the context in which we live. A life lived in the context of relationship with God will produce different fruits from a life lived in a context of alienation and sin. The same acts of confession, choosing, sharing the Good News and serving will produce fruits appropriate to the context. Christ demonstrated for us the life of a child of God. He came into the world as a servant, and he calls us to follow him.

CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO THIS LIFE

The Old Testament opens with God creating this world and calling it good. God created humans in God's image and established a relationship with us that has never been erased, despite our many turnings away. In the New Testament we learn that God became flesh in order to complete this relationship, to become one with us and to demonstrate

clearly to us what a true child of God fully participating in this relationship would be like. God comes offering us life in all its fullness and asks only that we give up our alienation and our identity as sinners in exchange. In the crucifixion God experiences our alienation fully so that it will be safe for us to experience it fully also. Once we have gone through that experience we can also know the truth about crucifixion and death--that we are raised to new life as children of God, bound no longer by sin and alienation, free to relate to each other in the way that God relates to us and to have life in all its abundance.

Being a Christian is not about avoiding eternal damnation in hell. It is not about putting off the pleasures of life, following confining rules, and "being good" now so that we may enjoy ourselves in heaven later. It is not about resigning ourselves to a miserable existence in this present world while we yearn for meaning and release from our burdens in some eschatological happy ending that will retroactively make the whole thing worthwhile. This sort of hopeless resignation, despair and smallness of vision is not the adventure to which Christ calls us.

The New Testament speaks very little about death, and when it does it always points us back to life. There are different points of view expressed in the New Testament concerning what might happen after we die: perhaps we will enter eternal life immediately; perhaps we will sleep until the end of time and then be resurrected. What is clear is that whatever happens, even our death is in the hands of the same God who created us and whose fellowship we can now enjoy. It is

this present enjoyment of fellowship with God, a life in the Spirit, to which the New Testament calls us.

God loves this world, and God loves the children made in God's image. God took human form, and in that form God was pleased to eat with saints and sinners alike. Jesus made whole people out of emotional and physical cripples. There is nothing we have to do now to attain a relationship with God. We were created in relationship with God, and nothing has ever been able to separate us from the love of God. To the extent that we do not have the abundance of life which flows out of relationship with God, we are encountering the barriers we have to experiencing ourselves, who we really are, children of God. Christ came to free us from all our barriers. He offers us satisfaction and nurturance in our jobs, our relationships, politics, sex, money, in being alone--in all of life.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION: DISCOVERING WHO WE ARE

The process of discovering (or uncovering) who I am is very much a process of personal crucifixion and death. I must choose to die to all that I cling to for personal identity. It is not only my wrongdoings that stand between me and God: all my beliefs about who I am and who God is become barriers to the relationship when I make my beliefs the basis of my life.

The Act We Present to the World

Every person has an act, a constellation of roles s/he plays in life: I am a student, minister, husband, friend, victim, sinner, saint, etc. One's act is one's presentation in the world, and everyone has an act. However, when I lose touch with who I really am I start believing that I am my act(s). I define myself by my role, and I begin to believe that I cannot be anything else. When I identify myself with a particular way of being I have to act that particular way from then on for fear of losing my identity.

To a larger extent than most of us would admit our acts are constructed in order to hide who we are afraid we really are. If I am afraid of being stupid I must know the answer to everything, and my answer has to be right. My life is controlled and limited by those things about myself which I am unwilling to confront, confess and surrender.

A person who is controlled by his/her fear of failure, for example, will do anything to try to prove that s/he is not a failure. Yet s/he will never be able to enjoy the fruits of success, no matter how successful s/he is, because everything in his/her life is controlled by the fear of failure. Failure becomes the context for everything in his/her life. Success is a form of failure when it is held within the context of failure.

Alienation

The source of alienation. There are many aspects to human beings. One thing that is true about us which we rarely admit is that

we are evil. Sometimes we say the words, but rarely do we take it personally. The truth is that we are evil. Each of us has the potential to commit the most monstrous acts we can imagine; we are capable of committing any evil we can imagine. While our potential for good is as great as our potential for evil, we are controlled by our evil because we lie about it. We fear that the evil may be our defining characteristic, and we construct our lives to keep anyone from finding out, especially ourselves. Our lives are controlled by our lies, by the wrongdoings we commit and by the energy we expend in suppressing the consciousness of our evil. Our sins and the resulting feelings of alienation become the context in which we live our whole lives.

Fruits of alienation. A person whose life is lived in the context of alienation will do anything to prove s/he is not alienated from God. One way to do this is to live as though there were no God, and to have his/her identity dependent on proving this by wrongdoing. Another way to deny one's alienation from God is by being good, a trap into which many Christians fall. Such a person may study theology, participate actively in the church, believe the creeds, and do many good works. If all these actions come out of the context of alienation the fruits of such worthy activities will be bitterness, guilt and continued doubt about one's salvation. Only a person whose life is held in bondage to sin and alienation would try to prove his/her salvation. A person whose life is lived in relationship with God will find that the fruits of the Spirit speak for themselves. There will be certainty

and serenity for that person, and to those around him/her it will be obvious that this person's life is lived in the Spirit. This is why Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits."¹

Belief. Another way to handle the discomfort of alienation is through belief. I can *believe* that I am saved from my alienation. However, belief cannot save me from my sense of alienation. Beliefs suppress whatever experience I am unwilling to confront; they do not save me from bondage to that experience. In fact, beliefs function to keep me trapped. If I base my identity on a belief that I am saved from my sin, then my survival depends on the maintenance of that belief. Along with the belief that I am saved I will carry the suppressed experience of alienation. As long as I cling to my belief, I cannot let go of my sin. A "saved sinner" is still a sinner.

Born Again: Transformation, Not Change

A careful distinction made in the *est* training is the difference between being *changed* and being *transformed*. *Change* involves an alteration of the form of a substance without affecting the substance itself. For example, we can change the shape of a mass of water by putting the same water into a different container. We can also change the water into steam or ice, and it will remain H₂O. In *transformation* the essence of the substance becomes wholly new, while the form may remain the same. Transformation is a miracle.

¹ Matt. 7:20

A "saved sinner" is a changed sinner. The essence is the sinner. Just like frozen water or boiling water is still water, a reformed sinner or saved sinner is still a sinner. The person's identity and energy are still wrapped up in alienation. A transformed sinner, on the other hand, no longer has his/her identity tied to sin in any way. S/he is now a child of God. His/her identity and context for life is based in relationship with God, rather than in his/her fear of being an unredeemable, alienated sinner. While the physical appearance, lifestyle and actions of a child of God may be the same as before, the person's experience of those things will be transformed.

John 3 says that we must be born again. In this passage Nicodemus tells Jesus that this is impossible for people to do. No matter how hard we try we can only change the particulars; we cannot alter the context of our lives. We cannot be born again. It is hopeless. We can never free ourselves from sin. Elsewhere the Gospels describe the disciples as feeling this same hopelessness. They asked, "Who, then, can be saved?" Jesus responded, "With men (people) this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."²

There is only one way to experience freedom and spontaneity in a life enslaved by my pretenses and fears: I must die. I must freely choose that which is utterly hopeless. I must surrender everything with which I have identified myself: my beliefs, my pretenses, my fears, my hopes, my dreams, my righteousness, my good deeds. I must even surrender the notion that I am reconciled to God already. When

² Matt. 19:25-26

there is nothing left of my own ego, pride, and mind, when who I have believed myself to be has been surrendered and has died, I am left with nothing. In that nothingness I have a direct experience of the Source of everything that is--a direct experience of God touching my life in a peace which passes all understanding.

Once I have experienced this profound relationship with God, nothing can ever separate me from God. I have been born again as a child of God, created in the image of God. Once I have had this experience I find that there is no longer any "apart from God." In fact, there never was any "apart from God." "Apart from God" was the fundamental lie which was the final barrier between me and experiencing my relationship with God.

CHILDREN OF GOD: LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Christ does not call us to believe in the abundant life. He wants us actually to experience satisfaction, joy and aliveness in our everyday lives--to "have life in all its fullness." The fruits of the Spirit are available to each of us every day to the extent that we choose to live as children of God. It is not the actions that produce the fruits we are seeking, but the process of confession, choice, sharing and service. Gradually there is less and less effort involved in a life of discipleship as we discover ever more fully our true nature as children of God.

Confession

Within the context of alienation confession functions to heighten the awareness of sin and alienation and increases one's sense of blame, shame and guilt as a function of the mind's resistance to acknowledging the suppression of the experience of evil. Any serious observation of my own evil threatens my identity which is based on the belief that I am not evil. Emotions of guilt, discomfort and physical distress may arise to keep me from directly confronting my evil. Within the context of alienation, confession is of value to the degree that it increases the person's hopelessness to the point in which s/he gives up trying to save him/herself. A person trapped in the belief that s/he does not need to be saved or that s/he is saved already cannot confess. Therefore, when a person does confess truly, s/he is in a space to be able to surrender to God and have his/her life transformed.

Within the context of relationship with God one will still have pretenses, fears and wrongdoings arise. However, these things are no longer a threat to the relationship; indeed, the relationship is itself a safe space in which to acknowledge and communicate wrongdoings, pretenses and fears. God knows all these things about us anyway. There is no need to suppress the upsets, the disappointments, the failings. There is no need to justify oneself or to make others wrong. In this relationship with God one can look at one's experience truthfully, acknowledge responsibility and then take the appropriate action to make amends or to alter the circumstances so that the particular incident

does not have to be repeated. Confession consecrates *all* the circumstances of one's life as a gift to God. This cleansing process enables one to re-experience the newness of life in the Spirit moment by moment.

Deciding and Choosing

The *est* training distinguishes between *deciding* and *choosing*. *Deciding* comes from the mind and is based on beliefs or automatic responses; there is no responsibility or satisfaction experienced; there is no sense of Self. *Choosing* is to select freely and after considerations. Choosing has its source in Self rather than in the circumstances in which we are involved. In choosing one looks at all the options, acknowledges them, and then out of his/her experience of Self freely selects. It is a spontaneous sense rather than a belief, judgment, feeling or automatic response. *I* choose, rather than letting my beliefs and considerations choose. Choice is an experience of one's birthright as a child of God, the right to be responsible, to be the source of his/her choices. Making a decision is a selling out to one's limitations, essentially a capitulation to sin.

Paul describes one's identity as a child of God:

...You are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons....So

through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.³

When we let our beliefs control our lives we live as slaves in the world God created as our home. Only when we are willing to be responsible as children of God and willing to choose moment by moment our lives do we experience our nature as children and heirs. It is the very nature of children of God to choose. Once one is in touch with one's experience of Self, choices become increasingly spontaneous and satisfying without effort.

Sharing the Experience

There is no exclusivity about being a child of God. Exclusivity is a survival pattern attached to a belief. Christ does not offer us beliefs but freedom from belief. Christ offers the life of the Spirit to all. In fact, everyone already is a child of God: some experience their relationship; some are unconscious of the relationship and artificially restrict themselves to a context smaller than that which is available. Since God loves all of God's children, then anything which is a barrier to our experience of relatedness with God and with each other has its source in alienation. When we close off another person we close off a part of ourselves as well. We are all children of God: we are all related. There can be no reconciliation between myself and God without reconciliation between myself and others, since the barriers which I erect between myself and others are the same barriers

³Gal. 3:29-4:5, 7

which I erect between myself and God:

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.⁴

Evangelism. When we experience who we are we do not withdraw from the world. We take what we have found back into the world, not as a duty but as a joyful expression of an experience which cannot be contained, which by its very essence shines forth. The nature of God is involvement in the world, as demonstrated in the Incarnation. As children of God we discover that this is our own nature as well. One way of expressing this desire to be involved is to participate in sharing the Good News of the new life we have found through our encounter with God so that others, too, may share this experience:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.⁵

Discipleship. When our sense of social mission has its source in duty, obligation, and self-congratulation this is obvious to all who come in contact with it, regardless of the lofty phrases in which we wrap it. Serving others from our own righteousness produces resentment and anger and no experience of satisfaction for either giver or recipient. If I am compelled by my sense of duty or if I believe that I am obligated to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick in order *that I might be saved*, then I can never allow hunger,

⁴Matt. 5:23-24

⁵Matt. 5:14-15

poverty, illness and evil to completely disappear because the survival of my identity as one who does good deeds and deserves to be saved depends on the continued existence of these conditions. That is, *my very salvation depends on my perpetuating suffering and evil!*

When we serve others as an expression of our relationship with God, those who are served have an experience of who they are. They get a sense of their own relationship as a child of God. Those who serve and those who are served are nurtured. Thus, evangelism and social action are aligned, and the form in which the service is rendered becomes secondary. It is only out of relationship with God that we can allow suffering and evil to be alleviated.

God loves everyone totally, followers of Jesus no more nor less than anyone else. What Christ offers us specifically as his disciples is the opportunity to actively participate in the unfolding of God's purpose. The more we are willing to participate, the more expanded is our experience of relationship with God. The reward for participating with God in serving the world is a bigger job:

Well done, good and faithful servant;
You have been faithful over a little,
I will set you over much;
enter into the joy of your master.⁶

Conclusion

Our relationship with God is complete, whole, perfect and lacking nothing. There is nothing we need to do to complete our

⁶ Matt. 25:21

our identity as children of God except to tell the truth. Life flows from the fullness of Self, not out of the search for Self. Our relationship with God is experienced in its fullness as a result of our surrendering the position that we are not related to God, letting our old self die and being born again into a new life as a child of God. We express ourselves as children of God by taking responsibility for ourselves and the world the way it is (confession) and for the way we would like it to be (discipleship).

Christ did not bring us a new belief system about how life works. He demonstrated to us in human form God's relationship with us. Christ came into the world as a servant, and in so doing he showed us that our own nature as children of God is to serve.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTRIBUTION OF *est* TO MY PREACHING

This chapter considers the effect of my participation with *est* on my preaching. The result has been that I am now clear on my purpose as a minister and I have a sense of how to use the preaching form to support my purpose. There is no longer struggle in my relationship with God. I have some notions about relating with a congregation. The sermons at the end of the chapter demonstrate my theology and the impact and contribution of *est* to that theology.

THE PURPOSE OF A SERMON

I used to think that a sermon was a logical argument designed to convince people of a rational truth with the intended result that the listeners agree, assuming that thereafter they would base all their actions on that idea. I also once had the notion that sermons were intended to convince people that they were sinful. Then I thought that people should be convinced that they were *not* sinful. It seems to me now that the purpose of a sermon is threefold: to allow people to look at their lives in such a way as to have an experience of their true Self as children of God; to create space for them to make a commitment to life in the Spirit; and to support them in that life.

THE PREACHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Creating the space for the sermon to be received is the first step in the sermon process which will culminate in the public delivery.

Self-examination

In the *est* training I had the opportunity to look deeply into my own life. I was able to confront my own evil, confess it, and then move on. Having once surrendered my self-concept as a sinner I was then able to direct my attention to an awareness of myself as a child of God. Since having this experience I am willing to continue looking at my evil each time it arises, confess it, and surrender it to God. As I am willing to examine my life continually in this manner, I am more able to share from my experience of aliveness as a child of God moment by moment. I no longer have to be stuck in the glorious spiritual moments of the past that with time have become beliefs rather than vital experience.

Who I am as a person speaks louder than what I say in my Sunday morning sermon. If my life is aligned with what I preach, my sermon will be reinforced for the listener. This willingness to examine my life and the resultant security in my identity as a child of God are probably the greatest contribution to my preaching that I have received from *est*. Before attempting to write a sermon the preacher should be responsible for this self-examination so that what s/he gives to the listeners comes out of his/her relationship with God, rather than his/her beliefs, biases and automatic responses.

Clarity of Purpose

It is important for the preacher to keep the purpose of the sermon constantly before him/her when preparing. The sermon should be consciously directed toward the purpose of transforming people's lives: it should allow those who are not in touch with their identity as children of God to experience that transformation, and it should nurture all present in the life in the Spirit. Being clear about my purpose in preaching allows me to shape my sermons in a focused way to further the realization of the purpose.

Instrument of the Holy Spirit

While writing the sermon on forgiveness ("Forgive Us Our Trespasses," pp.83-91) it became very clear to me that I had to trust the Holy Spirit to use the sermon form to move in people's lives rather than to give in to my frustration with the limitations of the sermon form.

At first I had wanted to use the sermon as a set-up for an exercise on experiencing forgiveness similar to the one done in the Prayer Renewal Workshop I attended. As I was writing the sermon I realized that it simply would not work in a 15-minute sermon to set up and allow the congregation to complete an exercise that might take over an hour. I realized that all I could do to accomplish my purpose was to look for what might work within the sermon/worship form and to trust the results to the Holy Spirit.

In that instant of surrendering my good idea to God, I saw that every week in the worship service the congregation says the Lord's Prayer. If something about that prayer could come alive for them, if they could use this prayer as an acknowledgement of their judgments and as a reminder of the forgiveness available, then the sermon would work. It was not necessary to create a "catalytic experience." I could deliver the Good News and trust the interaction of the people and the Holy Spirit.

THE PREACHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONGREGATION

The purpose of the preacher is also the purpose of the people who come to church to hear the Word of God.

Acknowledging the Purpose of the Preacher and the Congregation

Only people who are willing for miracles to happen come to church, and the preacher should openly acknowledge that s/he and the congregation are aligned in their purpose of transformation. The preacher should state that the service is specifically intended as a safe space in which to encounter God. A preacher who is not willing to create the space for people to have an experience of their relationship with God should not be preaching. Those who come expecting to be nourished and are sent home still hungry will become enemies--upset, frustrated and further alienated from their true identity as children of God.

Insight into Preacher-Congregation Conflict

In looking at my relationship to the congregation and my theology, I recently discovered that underneath all my good ideas and lofty verbiage about service and transformation, I had the point of view that people want to be miserable. I viewed their coming to church saying that they wanted to have their lives work, to experience a new life and a closer relationship with God, as a disguise to justify their miserable lives. Since this was my point of view, I created that experience all around myself. Consequently *I* was miserable. When I looked at the pay-off for me in the situation I noticed that I was very self-righteous about my role as the hardworking minister trying to enlighten my obstinate flock (who didn't deserve to be born again anyway.) As a preacher I was in a position to be able to "dump" my upset on the entire congregation. I saw that if I persisted in this belief I would never be able to create space for any of the congregation to "get off it" and have new life, and that my life as a minister could produce only spiraling frustration for myself and the congregation.

When I finally became aware that this was the belief underlying my public presentation of the sympathetic, hardworking minister act, I started looking at my experience. I confessed my own obstinacy and I took responsibility for creating the situation. I watched the upset and resentment disappear. I experienced that underneath my belief was a clear experience that people really do want to have their lives transformed and that my congregation wants my assistance rather than my judgments and evaluations of them. I also realized that until it was

safe for me to want people not to get better, until I could tell the truth about that to myself and to God, there would have been no opportunity for me to "get off it," to begin to serve rather than discussing it or preaching about it.

The contribution of this insight into my relationship with the congregation should be obvious. This was an illustration to me of the moment by moment experience of life in the Spirit. While the form of my preaching may not change, the fruits will be different. Now I will be able to have around me people who are in touch with their relationship with God. People have the space to experience God around me since I no longer have to be right about being the only one being faithful to God. This basic willingness to continue looking into my relationship with God and to be continually in the process of transformation is a contribution of *est* to my ministry.

THE SERMON FORM AND PROCESS

The sermon should be constructed to allow the hearers to discover their identity as children of God. The sermon should utilize the elements inherent to the form, including the tradition of transformation in preaching, the continuity of the preacher-congregation relationship, and the worship setting. The sermon should engage the total listener, inspire the people, confront them, allow them to confess their failings and wrongdoings, present them with the choice for transformation, and provide them with opportunities to express their commitment to living in the life of the Spirit.

The Sermon Form

Transformation as tradition in preaching. Preaching has a long tradition of being where people go when they are ready to have their lives turn around. The preacher does not have to spend a great deal of time setting this up. People come with the desire for transformation. They also come with their own personal histories, many with disappointments and frustrations with preachers and churches. The preacher may need to try several approaches to see what works best with his/her congregation in terms of style, feedback, etc.

Continuity of preacher-congregation relationship. For the most part the preacher has the same listeners every week. Since the experience of transformation does not have to happen in the course of one session, each Sunday's service does not have to be as ~~intense~~ as something like the *est* training, a revival or a weekend workshop. While transformation takes no time in itself in which to occur, it may take several months of preaching about grace or a service project or fund-raising to see the results manifested in the physical world. Sermons should be written consciously to produce an effect over time.

Another advantage to the continuity is that as people get used to a particular preacher's style the sermons can be designed to take this into account. For example, if the people know that the sermon requires their looking into their own experience they soon will begin to do this automatically. They also will become freer with their feedback, and the preacher will be able to serve them better.

Worship setting. The liturgy, music, religious symbols, etc. should all be used to best advantage. For example, the preacher might refer specifically to the position of the altar as a comparison of the position of prayer in one's life. The preacher should choose the hymns, choir music, scripture, liturgical responses, prayers, bulletins, altar decorations, method of seating, etc. in order to support and reinforce the sermon.

Sermon Content

The content of the sermon should support the safe space, engaging the listener's verbal or nonverbal participation, inspiring and confronting each individual listener. People should be given the opportunity for confession and commitment. Thus, the content should be directed toward creating the environment for self-examination leading to the experience of transformation. The stories, sharing, jokes, etc. should be deliberately chosen to strike a chord in the listeners at several levels; they should experience God's presence in their lives (be inspired) and not just hear ideas about God that do not move them to a new level of consciousness. Intellectual ideas and logical arguments should be used carefully to further the purpose, rather than provide grist for the mind.

The sermon accomplishes its purpose by being a mirror into which the people may look at their own lives. Some elements used to create this mirror include the Scriptures, the life of Jesus, the contemporary world, the life of the preacher, and the lives of the people themselves.

Scripture. The Bible is a history of the divine-human encounter. The worst and best of humanity is recorded there: our recurring dreams and failures. Selections from the Scriptures can be used to inspire, confront and comfort. Familiar passages tend to bring up images for the listeners of past associations. Presented from a variety of perspectives, new insights can arise over the years. The Scripture reflects the human race and each individual person.

Life of Jesus. The Incarnation is the supreme demonstration of God's love for us. The life of the person Jesus is a demonstration of what life as a child of God could be for each of us. The crucifixion was God's confrontation of the forces of sin and alienation which created a safe space in which we can confront our own sin and alienation individually. The Resurrection illustrated the Good News that alienation and despair is not the final word about life. Christ shows us the way of surrender and commitment, and in the space of dying to our old life we are born again to a new life based in relationship with God and each other.

Life of the preacher. Preaching is also a sharing of the preacher's own personal experience of new life in Christ, with all its ups and downs, so that others may be inspired to look into their own experience and discover that same new life for themselves. While all Christians are a demonstration to the world of what the new life in Christ has to offer, the minister/preacher has asked for the opportunity to share his/her experience in a special relationship with other Christians and non-Christians. The congregation should be so inspired

by their relationship with the preacher that they will experience their own relationship with God as a result.

The contemporary world. We are children of God who for the most part have lived our lives in alienation from our Source. We tell ourselves otherwise and justify ourselves, and we still have the fruits of the context from which we choose to live our lives. The society in which we live, the world as a global community, is a reflection of our personal level of responsibility. This is perhaps the most uncomfortable mirror in which to look and probably the most accurate in terms of where we are now, rather than where we could be. It indicates our level of responsibility. It is an excellent sermon resource.

The life of the individual listener. No matter which element the sermon is utilizing in creating a mirror, the listener should always be directed back to his/her own life experience. All of the preacher's good ideas are worthless if they do not lead to this self-examination on the part of the listener.

Everything should assist the congregation in telling the truth to themselves. They will have to struggle through all of the resistance which their minds will throw up for them, and the only way through is for them to be willing to look and tell the truth. It is only when the person discovers for him/herself that moment of transformation can relationship with God become the context for that person's life. The sermon must provide them with a mirror to assist them in this process.

The Sermon Process

The process of the sermon should include getting into communication, confronting the people with their sins or absence of the fruits of the Spirit (which may be more easily confronted by some), confession, opportunity to commit oneself (choice), opportunity to make the choice real in the world.

Getting into communication. The preacher should have his/her attention on the people rather than on him/herself. When I am secure in my own identity I do not have my attention on myself. To the extent that I do have my attention on myself I will draw other people's attention to me. They will be thinking about what a wonderful preacher they have or how nervous I am or something else, rather than looking into their own experience. When my attention is clearly focused on the people I am serving, their attention is also directed back to themselves. In the ideal sermon the preacher and the preaching itself would "disappear" into the background while the hearer's attention is on the experience to which s/he is being directed. I have an expanded ability to produce this result through my leadership training at *est*.

The sermon should also deliberately engage the attention of the whole person: the logical, the emotional and the sense of Self out of which these come. During the sermon the people should be allowed to experience at least two or three different spaces. They should laugh, cry, get angry, bored, sad; their imagination and intellect should be sparked. Most importantly, they should be inspired. When they are

inspired they are in touch with Self. Inspiration results from the preacher's willingness to share him/herself--not just the stories but the true experience devoid of the pretenses and protective barriers. When the preacher "comes from" who s/he is, those around him/her get in touch with who they are.

Listeners will be involved to the extent that the various aspects of their personalities are engaged by the sermon. When one or two aspects of the personality wander off there is not enough attention and intention for transformation to take place.

Confrontation. If my life is to be transformed I will have to do more than consider some good ideas. I will have to do more than allow myself to be emotionally swayed. I must confront my entire life. I must let go of my attachment to my belief that I do not need to be saved. I must confront who I am afraid I am and be willing to experience the attendant alienation, pain, sadness, etc., which has been attached all the time underneath my beliefs. The sermon and service should provide a space safe enough for this self-confrontation to occur. Humor may be used to good effect in this process.

Confession. If the preacher has created the space for the people to confront the truth about their lives, they will want the opportunity to acknowledge what they have discovered. When it is safe for them to acknowledge the truth without blame, shame or guilt, the confession will be a cleansing process and an opening to God. It is during confession that surrender may most easily occur. When we truly surrender, when we finally give up trying to save ourselves, we

experience the peace that underlies all of our existence, simply at one with our Creator.

Choice. Choice is really only experienced by those who know who they are, as choice is a function of the Self. One who is not conscious of his/her identity as a child of God will make decisions. The sermon should offer all the opportunity to choose. A person may discover his/her identity as a child of God through the process of choosing. Those who know who they are should be supported in choosing often the life in the Spirit.

Opportunity to participate. The sermon should offer some actual physical "doingness" as a way to respond to the sermon and make real in the world the choice one has made. As the letter of James admonishes:

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.¹

The opportunities to participate could take a variety of forms. The altar call and the offering are two traditional ways to demonstrate one's commitment. Other examples might include signing a pledge card to attend a prayer group, to type in the church office, to participate in the world hunger project, etc.

¹ Jas. 1:22-25

ABOUT THE SERMONS IN THIS PROJECT

Reflection on the Transformation of My Sermons

Personal experience. In contrast to the sermons written before I took the *est* training, the sermons I am preaching now speak out of my personal experience of a scriptural passage.

Before, I had little experience of what the Scriptures meant, so I adhered to the commentaries. I think now that it is important for the preacher to speak from his/her personal experience in order to enable the congregation to discover similar experiences in their own lives. Since my purpose in preaching is for people to have an experience of themselves as children of God, I want to make sure that their attention is directed back to themselves, directed to self-examination. Thus, a delicate balance is needed for the preacher to share from his/her own experience rather than to talk about him/herself so much that s/he becomes personally interesting (or boring) and fails to accomplish his/her purpose.

Sharing aliveness. I notice that I tend to get very "heavy" and "significant" in my sermons. While this can be used to good advantage at appropriate times, too much of it would make my preaching lose the aliveness and joy I want to communicate about being a truly forgiven child of God.

Willingness to be uncomfortable. I used to preach "nice" sermons with rather bland ideas, which did not open space for people to experience the transforming grace of God. I recently realized that I was unwilling to confront people with their sinfulness because I did

not want to look at my own judgments of them and my own hardness of heart. I have discovered, since taking the training, that when I am supporting people I can say anything to them, because no matter how uncomfortable they are and I am, the support is also clear. I think that the sermons in this project will support people in confronting themselves and in having the space to surrender their lives to God and to be born again into new life in Christ.

"To Walk in the Newness of Life"

Purpose. Beliefs are antithetical to life in the Spirit. Even the basic Christian affirmation that Christ frees us from sin can stand in the way of the experience of forgiveness if it is held as a belief. The purpose of this sermon is to allow people to experience the hopelessness of beliefs being able to produce an alive relationship with God. The result I intend is that the people be able to surrender their lives, including their beliefs to God and thereby open the space for the experience of walking in the newness of life in the Spirit.

Scripture. The passage is a familiar one seen in a new light.

Prayer. The opening prayer acknowledges why we come to worship: "to discover our relationship with God." It acknowledges that the sermon may be uncomfortable and asks God to prepare us to attend to the message. This all serves to support the safe space for people to look honestly at their lives during the sermon.

Elements of the sermon. This sermon includes confrontation, confession, choice, altar call and opportunity for concrete action in response to the sermon.

"As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us"

Purpose. Our judgments of people and our inability to forgive are barriers that keep us stuck in slavery to sin. The purpose of this sermon is to allow people to observe the extent to which they judge others, the extent to which judgments control their lives, and some of the justifications that hold this demon in place. The sermon offers the opportunity to confess one's guilt and be cleansed of it, opening oneself to the experience of forgiveness for one's own wrongdoings and rehabilitating one's ability to forgive others.

Scripture. The primary text is the Lord's Prayer. This is generally considered a comforting prayer, and its familiarity contributes to the safe space for confession and surrender. It is a text to which people will be able to turn often when they need to be reminded of God's forgiving grace.

Elements of the sermon. This sermon utilizes the worship setting, confrontation, confession, humor, and opportunity for action.

People are confronted with the hopelessness of their judging. The preacher presses them to eliminate any remaining "out" or escape. The only option is to surrender it all to God in confession. There is a suggestion of concrete action that people might take by allowing them to look at with whom they would like to make amends during the coming

week. When the sermon gets too heavy humor lightens the atmosphere in order to further the purpose of the sermon, not to distract people from looking at their lives.

"Come Live in the Mansion!"

Purpose. The purpose of this sermon is to allow people to look at where they are at about participating in life and to discover that it is through participation with God in the world that we express our true nature as children of God.

Scripture. John 14:2-4 is often thought of as pointing to comfort in the afterlife as a reward for good behavior in this life. I have used it here to point back into this life. We do not have to wait to enjoy the fruits of living in the Spirit. I deliberately chose to use a familiar passage in a way that might spark people to reconsider long-held positions.

John 14:12 is a passage that we do not often confront. The notion that we are called to do "greater works than these" causes us to confront our level of responsibility for our mission in the world.

Elements of the sermon. The life of Jesus and the contemporary world are held up as mirrors; living images are used and different emotional tones are set by sudden shifts in the flow of the sermon. A safe space for choice is created by pointing out that God does not need us, but rather offers us opportunity.

Opportunity to participate. The opportunities offered are invented. This sermon makes the point that one cannot participate in the world in the abstract. One must make a concrete commitment. Participation is an expression of our nature as children of God. The dedication of the offering is included here to show how part of the rest of the worship setting could be tied in with the sermon. This dedication is a response to the sermon, and the sermon is not complete without the opportunity for such a response.

SUMMARY

My involvement with *est* has had a tremendous impact on my ministry, my theology and my preaching. This has shown in my personal growth, my transformed experience of the Scripture and in my relationship with God. I am now willing to support people even when it is uncomfortable, and I am able to set up and observe "space," noticing what works and what does not work and being willing to "get off it" and do what will serve people rather than further my good ideas about it.

Personal Growth

I am now able to look at my own life and tell the truth about what I discover. Sometimes this has been quite uncomfortable, and it occasionally still is. I am able to confess my failures and wrongdoings and surrender them to God and to get on with life. It has become a challenge and a joy for me to press against the newest barriers and to have my life expand in the process.

Transformed Experience of the Scriptures and Relationship with God

Christianity has come alive for me since I took the *est* training. I am now able to claim the promises that have always been there for the asking: aliveness, joy, peace and relationship with God. What I formerly believed I now experience. The Scriptures are no longer mysterious. There is a flashing of insight when I read the Bible now.

Ability to Support Others

I now see the sermon as an opportunity to share myself with others to the end that they will discover themselves. I am willing to confront people with their life-deadening sins. Formerly I wanted to give up the notion of sin altogether and speak directly about being a child of God. I discovered that while child of God is the underlying reality, one still must go through the experience of total alienation, hopelessness and death in order to experientially discover the newness of life available as a child of God. I am now willing to support people through this transition.

Ability to Create and Use *Space* to Serve People

Part of my education as an *est* assistant was learning to set up, to be aware of, and consciously to use *space* to forward my purpose. This involves manipulation of the physical environment, consciousness of the emotions and physical signals of the listeners, and most importantly it is an awareness of my own inner signals, a process of constantly looking into my experience. I am also willing to go on to something else if what I am doing is not working.

THE SERMONS

TO WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE

Scripture

Romans 5:20-6:4

Law came in to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Prayer

God, we come here to discover our relationship with you. This saying of St. Paul is hard. Most of us still feel trapped in our smallness and sin. We do not feel like we have died to it, and the idea of dying to anything is not comfortable. Open our hearts today. Be with us as we look at our own lives to see what is between us and the newness of life that Paul talks about--for we would walk in the newness of life. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. AMEN.

Message

When I was a child I read a lot. I was not very strong and did not participate in physically strenuous activities if at all possible. Somewhere I decided that who I was was a person who spent a lot of time

reading and not much time doing active things with other people. The problem with this was that after I made that decision about myself I *had* to be that way--because anything else would have been out of character. When I did want to be "one of the guys" I made myself miserable. Some part of me felt threatened. If I turned out to be as good at sports as the others, my decision about my self-identity would be wrong. That part of me that felt threatened was very clever about giving me reasons not to be part of the group: I was after all not very well coordinated and not very strong--but I had a good mind and that was better anyway, and someday I would appreciate all I had learned as a result of the struggles I was going through now. I even had my flat feet to fall back on if the other reasons failed to keep me isolated: No one could expect me to keep up on a five-mile hike with such bad feet! I really believed that this was who I was. I did not like it, but that was who I was anyway. I let it control my life so much that I literally was my belief!

All of us have beliefs about who we are and how the world is.
And we let our beliefs limit our lives. If we believe "Hard work will get you where you want to go," then we cannot possibly let it be easy for us; it will have to be hard. People who believe "You only go around once, so get it while you can" are compelled to spend their lives pursuing the things our culture says are the "good life"--even if they do not like to ski they will have to be out on the slopes anyway.

You, too, have beliefs that are barriers in your life. Look to see if you do not. Look at the things you are often uncomfortable doing and you're not sure why. It probably does not seem like you have

any particular belief about it, because the beliefs that control our lives do not look like mere beliefs--they look very real, very much "the way things are." We cannot do anything about it. These are the beliefs that keep us stuck in the decisions we made long ago about who we are.

Psychologists tell us that most of our life patterns are firmly established by the age of five years. Can you remember making those decisions about who you are that now control your life? Probably not. And if you believed the experts, you added another belief to your stack of early childhood patterns that you couldn't change them, which holds down those previous beliefs quite firmly.

Now, think about your ideas about God, who God is, how God acts in the world.

If you are anything like me, probably most of your pictures about God go back to your earliest Sunday School days. Do you think of God as a male? What picture do you have of the Holy Ghost? Jesus really does look like that first church school picture you remember, doesn't he? What do you know about God? How much of that is based on the same kind of beliefs that limit the rest of your life? And how much of what you know about God is based on your current experience? We may phrase our theology a little more sophisticatedly than we did at age five, and I wonder how much different our ideas really are.

What is treacherous about our beliefs is that we cannot see, literally cannot see, anything that does not fit our beliefs. For example, I used to believe that my father did not love me, and no matter what he did to show his love for me, I just could not get it. My

whole life was based on that crazy belief, and my self-identity, which depended on that belief, was more important to me than the satisfaction I might have received from a relationship with my father. That belief supported other beliefs: if your own father does not love you, you must not be good enough for anyone else to love either, so the way to survive is not to let anyone at all get close to you. Consequently, I made myself very lonely for many years, rather than see that my father did love me, had always loved me. I couldn't let myself be that wrong.

God is constantly showering good gifts on us, but most of us are so stuck in our beliefs about what a miracle should look like that we miss the answers to our prayers.

When was the last time you dared pray for something specific?
Was that prayer answered?

Or was it answered and you missed it because it didn't fit your picture of how it ought to be answered? For example, if you need money with which to pay some bills, you might pray for money. If your belief about answered prayer includes the picture that the money must suddenly appear on the doorstep out of nowhere, you might miss the idea of selling something or earning extra income from a hobby. If you do think of these alternatives to make money when it previously seemed hopeless to you, would you experience that as an answer to your prayer? Or would you say "I prayed for money and my prayer was not answered, so I had to sell something to get the money"? God is actively moving in our lives every day, and we throw away our chance to participate with God because our pictures of God working in the world are so small.

One of the central affirmations of the Christian faith is that Christ died to save us from our sin. Even this, the greatest, most wonderful act of all time, we have made into a limiting belief.

Most of us have no actual experience of what it means that Christ died to save us from our sins, yet we tie our Christian identity to being saved sinners. And we will do anything to be right about this identity. We refuse to acknowledge our day-to-day evil in any more than a general way, because if we did it might threaten our belief that we have been saved from our sins. If we do not look at our evil and confess it to God, how will we ever be rid of it?

We do not allow ourselves to experience God's grace and blessings in our lives because we know deep down that we do not deserve them. So we hide our sin, wrap it up in a pretense or a belief that we are freed from our wrongdoings and fool ourselves into thinking that our sins have disappeared. And we carry around the alienation and uneasiness with us. When we come to worship we talk about our belief that Christ has freed us from sin. We spend a lot of time in the Christian church talking about sin.

St. Paul warned the early Christians in Rome not to sin more that grace may abound. Apparently there were some people there who thought that if God's grace was shown in forgiving us when we were bad that if we had even more sins to forgive, God's grace would abound that much more. Now that sounds silly, and some people must have been serious about it if Paul had to write about it.

Is what we do so different from this, really? We do not necessarily commit more sins, but we talk about nothing else. Even

Paul fell into this trap when to point to God's great mercy he bragged of being the chief of sinners!

Christ died to set us free from our sin, and we are still stuck with it. We may or may not still do all the same wrongdoings as we did before we became Christians, but either way we carry around our sins as merit badges to show God's mercy. How foolish we are to think that God's mercy is dependent on our degrading ourselves and making ourselves into such worthless sinners! Christ came to free us from our sin. We do not have to carry it around with us any more. We do not have to be "saved sinners." A saved sinner is still a sinner.

If Christ died for us while we were still sinners, then NOTHING can separate us from the love of God, not even any sins we still carry around with us, confessed or not.

We are not God's enemies. We do not have to continue to hold onto our alienation from God in order to come into God's presence. We are God's children, created in the image of God. The glory of God is persons fully alive. Christ came that we might have life and have it in all its fullness, not so we could be convicted of our evil and continue dragging our "forgiven" sins around behind us forever.

Then why do we not feel like we are children of God? Why do we still feel condemned? Do you think that feelings mean anything? If God has proclaimed you forgiven, then you are forgiven. Do you think that just because you *feel* condemned that has anything to do with the *reality* of God loving you? It was while we were God's enemies that Christ died for us. How much more will G d do for us now that we are reconciled through Christ!

You hang onto your belief that you are saved to hide your deeper fear that you are still alienated from God. See if this is not so. You must give up that belief that you are saved. As a belief it keeps you stuck in your fear of being alienated, just as surely as my belief that I could not keep up with the others kept me apart from them as a child.

You are a sinner. You are not saved. You are evil! You have the potential for doing the worst evil you can imagine! You do not have any idea how evil you are. You are too stuck in your belief that you are saved to even look at how evil you are. Imagine something evil. You are ten times more evil than that. No, ten thousand times more evil!

And the truth is that you are evil and God loves you. If you could get that, you would have to bring your evil with you into your relationship with God. You can't do that because then you would have to take responsibility for your evil. You might have to give up some of your evil ways! God does not keep you out of the relationship. God does not stop showering you with good gifts because you are evil. God sends the rain to the just and the unjust.

It is you that will not allow yourself to receive God's good gifts when you know how evil you are. That is because beneath all your evil you are a totally responsible and ethical child of God. You are so ethical that you punish yourself for your wrongdoings. You send yourself to bed without any supper to punish yourself for not being in relationship with God. You destroy your marriages, your relationship with your children, you don't get satisfaction from your work. You have

money problems. God does not have to punish you--you are much more savage with yourselves. You separate yourself from the love of God because you are so evil.

There is only one way out, and that is to allow yourself to experience your sin totally, and to confess that sin to God. Confess it with the intention of surrendering it, not of continuing to wallow in it

It is your own wrongdoings and beliefs that are your barriers to experiencing the love of God. You must give up your belief that you are already saved. Look at your wrongdoings. You must be willing to get clear on *your* wrongdoings if you are to be able to confess them and surrender them to God.

In the end you must even give up the notion that you are a sinner, even a saved sinner, because beneath all your wrongdoings you are not a sinner. You are a child of God. Only your beliefs that you are unworthy and your unconfessed wrongdoings separate you from God's love.

You must surrender it all to God: You must surrender the belief that you are saved or that you do not need to be saved. You must surrender your sins and wrongdoings. You must surrender your unworthiness, your belief that who you are is a sinner. You must give up all your beliefs about who you are--they are the barriers to your experiencing who you really are.

When you have surrendered it all to God you will be left with nothing. And in that nothing you will experience peace. Peace from all the chatter in your mind, the endless debates about who you are, peace from your personal drama. And in that peace you will experience God.

It is in dying, dying to all to which you have clung, that you will experience the resurrection in your own life! You too may be born again! Will you choose now to walk in newness of life?

Time for Silent Prayer of Confession

Let us now take a few moments to silently confess to God all of our old beliefs, all of our wrongdoings. If you wonder if something might possibly be a barrier in your new life in Christ, it is. It is not the sin itself that keeps you from experiencing your relationship with God. It is your hanging on to it that keeps you back. Whatever comes up now, you can confess and surrender to God, no matter how small and petty it seems, no matter how terrible and awful. Nothing can separate you from God's love.

Everything which you are not willing to confess will get in your way of experiencing God's love in a continually new relationship with God. I invite you now, this moment, to surrender it all to God, and to walk in the newness of life.

Altar Call

Now is the moment to choose. If you would like to make a commitment to walk in the newness of life with Christ, or if you would like to re-dedicate yourself to a commitment you made in the past, I invite you to come to the altar now.

Completion

Have you ever seen anyone trying to hold down the floor? We used to do that as kids to get attention. How ridiculous, putting all

your effort into trying to make something be the way it is. Sometimes we try very hard to make our relationship with God be the way it is. We think that when we finally find God it will look different than it does beforehand. We think our problems will all disappear. The truth is that God is already supporting you in the midst of your problems.

You will find that your pictures of how life should be in relationship with God will still come up. You must continually surrender your beliefs, your wrongdoings, the new barriers that arise, and you will find that newness of your commitment being recreated moment by moment.

This coming week I would like to invite everyone to notice the automatic patterns that come up in your life, and just observe how often you let your beliefs about life run you. Whenever you are in an uncomfortable situation or you find yourself gossiping or committing some other wrongdoing, write it down. Keep a notebook with you. Write down what happens, how you responded, and any earlier similar situations that come to mind. Write down your physical sensations, your feelings, your thoughts.

Most of us are run by our beliefs and wrongdoings because we are not even conscious of them. This exercise is an opportunity for you to choose whether you want to live in the Spirit or if you want your pictures from the past to continue to run you. This process of writing down the barriers and wrongdoings may not be easy. You will be looking at the way you have always done it.

A lot of reasons will come up about why you should not do this. It may look silly. You may be too tired. You may think there is

too much to write or there may be nothing. If there is nothing, write that down. Write it all down. Your old patterns and barriers will come up to keep you from looking at your life. You may become angry or depressed. Write that down too.

There are notebooks for you outside the door. Pick one up on your way out. Notice if you are willing to commit yourself to doing this exercise for one week. If you are, pick up the notebook and go ahead and do the exercise, no matter what comes up for you as a good reason not to continue.

As you become conscious of the patterns and beliefs that control your life, see if you would be willing to surrender these to God. I did not say, "see if you are able to surrender them," because it will probably seem like you are not able. See if you are *willing*. If you are willing then ask God to take your burdens from you. If you are not willing to surrender these barriers and burdens, then give God your unwillingness. Your burdens may not all disappear at once, but as you continue to surrender to God the wrongdoings, the fears, the failings, you will find that your barriers have less and less control over you. And you will day by day walk in the newness of life.

AMEN.

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

Scripture

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. AMEN

Matthew 7:1-2

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.

Message

When you pray the Lord's Prayer do you ever feel guilty or anxious? Do you ever find yourself sort of drifting off, carried along by the words and suddenly find yourself saying AMEN? This particularly happens for me with the words "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

It is difficult enough to ask God to forgive me for my own evil without having also to look at my willingness for others to be forgiven. No matter how guilty I feel or how hard I try, at any given time there is always someone that I have not yet been able to forgive. It doesn't seem fair. It's bad enough to carry around the bitterness.

If I pray this prayer does that mean that God will not forgive me when I am not able to forgive this other person?

We all have people we cannot forgive. We try to forget instead, hoping if we suppress it hard enough and long enough the bitterness we carry around with us will go away. Unfortunately, hiding the garbage in the closet does not get rid of it. If you look, a particular person in your own life that you have not forgiven will pop into your consciousness. Yes, that one. Good.

We judge people all the time: "His hair is too long." "She dresses funny." "Only an immoral person would do something like that!" Isn't it funny how the first thing we notice about someone when we meet them is something wrong with them? And then we wonder why we are uncomfortable around other people. We know it is wrong to judge, so our relationship is immediately based on feeling guilty. Then we justify our judgments because we just *know* that we are right about it. We also have the uncomfortable feeling that if we are judging them, they might be judging us. Of course whatever they think about us is wrong. So to handle our uneasiness about that, we find something else to make them wrong for, just in case.

This became particularly clear to me last week when I was having lunch with a group of people that for the most part I had never met before. At first I could not understand why I was so uncomfortable. Then I realized that even before I was introduced to a person I found something wrong with him or her. My mind would not let me rest until I had found something wrong with each person there. Fortunately, I

have a quick mind and this did not take very long--about two seconds. Afterwards I was uncomfortable being there with the barriers I had put up between myself and these other people.

Did you ever notice how little our judgments and evaluations of other people affect them? No matter how much I am annoyed by the way a person chews her food or holds her fork, that does not seem to change the way she chews. Oh, I could make her uncomfortable about it, but she'd keep right on eating the way she eats. No matter what horrible fantasies I devised as a child to repay my brother for beating on me, his life continues to work just fine, and I am stuck with whatever resentment I am unwilling to let go of.

Ultimately, our judgments have little effect on others. When we do succeed in making them uncomfortable, it is usually because we are reminding them of some other thing in their life which they do not wish to confront. *Our* judgments are just that--our own judgments. We cannot give them away, no matter how hard we try. They stick by our side better than the best trained dog. They are always there, ready to spring into action, and then snapping back to heel at our side.

Our judgments do interfere with our relationships with others. If there is anything about a person that even remotely reminds us of *someone else* we once judged in the past, all of our judgments and resentments about that other person will also spring into action and "protect" us from having a relationship with the person we are with.

It is not what other people do that stands in the way of our relationship with them. For the most part, it is not what other people do that stands between us and *anything!* It is not them. It is us. It

is our own judgments, bitterness and resentments that we carry with us everywhere that block us in our relationships and in accomplishing our goals in life. It doesn't really matter who is with us, we would find something wrong with them. A different wife or boss or child or lover would not be any better. They would remind us of the same resentments. There really is no one out there to blame. It is our own judgments that sit in judgment of our lives. "For with the judgment you pronounce will you be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."

Judging others comes as automatically to us as our breathing, but rather than confessing our judgments and resentments we justify them. That procedure keeps those judgments stuck to us like cement. We judge others to avoid confronting our own evil. Somehow we think that when other people are bad it makes us look good. We gloss over Christ's standard for us: "You must be perfect, even as God is perfect." We substitute our own standard "Be better than everyone else." We try to be better by making others worse.

At our deepest, innermost self, though, we know that we are children of God, and that God's standard of perfection is our own standard also. Living by any other standard does not work. Children of God are by nature totally ethical, and we will not let ourselves get away with being less than perfect. That is why we are so miserable when we do not live up to our standards. That is why there is no satisfaction in trying to be better than everyone else by making ourselves right and others wrong. Jesus did not condemn us to being judged by our own judgments: we did! Jesus just reminded us. This

saying of Jesus seems harsh and unreasonable because it cuts through all of our self-righteousness and justifications about keeping other people stuck in their sins and wrongdoings.

And we have our very good reasons for not letting go of our judgments, for not forgiving others. "If I forgive him for taking the toy car, some day he will steal real cars." I think it is my duty not to forgive him, in order to keep him from getting worse, of course. With that much invested in my righteousness about my duty, I could not possibly allow him to get any better. That would make me wrong in my judgment of him.

Sometimes our judgments of others are right, simply right with no question about it. My brother really did take unfair advantage of me. Why should I forgive him? Why shouldn't I wait for him to make amends for his wrongdoing first? It isn't fair for me to have to initiate the reconciliation. No, it definitely is not fair. Yet I am the one who is miserable because of hanging on to my resentments. I could forgive him and have all that energy tied up in hating him to use for something else in my life. Or I can continue being right. When I do let go of the resentment I find space, space in which to experience love, not only love for my brother but love for all those other people that my resentment for my brother closed me off from.

Forgiving someone does not mean that we should forget. Forgiveness does not mean that we should continue to put ourselves in a position which invites being hurt again in the same way. You can let go of your bitterness and resentment toward someone who stole your money without again putting them in charge of the safe.

Forgiving someone does mean that we have to quit making them wrong. Just stop making them wrong without any change whatsoever on their part. The part of us that made the judgments in the first place sometimes wants to magnanimously make a show of forgiveness and then keep on knifing the person. It would rather have us be *right* than experiencing God's forgiveness and peace.

Judging the whole world is a big burden. It sucks away our time and energy. It is not what others do to us that limits our lives. That makes us less than we could be. It is our own judgments that we carry everywhere we go that limit us, that make our lives a misery, that steal the experience of joy and peace from our fingertips.

Look now into your own life. You will recall at least one or two people in your life that you have judged and not forgiven. The bitterness has not gone away. It clings to you still, ready to spring into action at a time or place you don't expect. You may hide it for awhile from yourself, but I tell you that your bitterness shows on your face! Every time you do not forgive someone you stuff your sin into your face or your body for everyone to see! There is nothing you can do about it. You cannot stop judging people any more than you can stop breathing.

You cannot save yourself. The only way out is to quit trying to be right and surrender your life to God. You can have your judgments and your resentments control your life, or you can confess them and give them up to God. God knows that you judge. And God is waiting to take your burden from you. God shouldered the burdens of the whole world on the cross. God is waiting for you.

You must confess it all. If you silently add "But I'm not as bad as John, it wasn't my fault," you will not be surrendering. You will be hanging on to the resentment and lying about it.

Jesus said "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Does this mean that if you cannot forgive, cannot confess and surrender the wrongs that that one person has done you that you will go unforgiven to your grave?

NO! This is not what Jesus meant! The truth is that God has already forgiven us for everything. The truth is that you have always been forgiven, even before you repented of your wrongdoing, before you did anything wrong. God has always been on your side. There is nothing you could ever do that could separate you from the love of God. YOU ARE FORGIVEN!

However, it is possible to be forgiven and not experience it. It is possible to be forgiven and feel just as guilty as if there were no forgiveness. God has forgiven you and it is possible to feel as guilty as if there were no God at all. Forgiveness is a total kind of experience, on or off, yes or no. You cannot experience some people as forgiven and others as not forgiven. You either have an experience of what forgiveness is, or you have a meaningless concept. The great truth that Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer is this: You cannot experience your own forgiveness if you are unwilling for someone else to be forgiven.

Jesus has us pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This is not so much a teaching that we should forgive others as it is a plea for God's help in forgiving

others: "Oh, God, help me to forgive others so I too might know your forgiveness."

So whenever you pray the prayer of Jesus, let it be a prayer of confession. Confess that you cannot forgive others. Confess that you are wrong in judging them.

Look now, see who it is that you would like to forgive. See if you are willing to let go of your resentments and judgments of that person. See if you are willing to stop making that person wrong. If you find that you are willing, just let go of it all. Let go of the resentments. Let go of the judgments. Let go completely. Do this now. Do not hang onto any particle of the resentment, just in case you need it to get back at that person later. Let that last little bit go also.

If you find that you cannot forgive someone, confess your unwillingness to God, and gradually God will cleanse you from even your unwillingness.

Confess and be cleansed. Open your hearts and know God's forgiveness for you. Do it now.

Silence for a Space

Prayer

Let us confess our sins and our judgments as we pray the prayer our Lord taught us: "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

Opportunity to Participate

If you have confessed your judgment of a particular person today and feel released from the power of that sin in your life, I invite you to make that feeling real for yourself in the world this week. Share with that person the things you have been holding back from him or her, and make amends for your wrongdoing. If the person has passed away, write that person a letter as though he or she were still with you. In the mystery of God that person will experience what you have to say to them.

Now, a caution: be gentle with your forgiveness. Oftentimes people do not even know that they have done something that requires your forgiveness. If you walk up to someone and say "I forgive you for the way you treated me, I know you can't help it," you are more likely to get a broken nose than a renewed relationship.

Share about what you realized about *yourself*. Share *your* wrongdoings and judgments and your need of forgiveness. Remember that it was *your judgments* that interfered with the relationship, and not what they did.

Forgiving someone is more for yourself than it is for the other person. Share the joy and peace you have found.

We are forgiven! Praise the Lord!

COME LIVE IN THE MANSION!

Scripture

John 24:24 (KJV)

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

John 14:12 (RSV)

Truly, truly, I say to you, (s)he who believes in me will do the works that I do; and greater works than these will (s)he do, because I go to the Father.

Message

Christians throughout the centuries have wondered about this place Jesus has prepared for us. Often we picture grand palaces of abundance. We imagine that Jesus has gone to prepare his heavenly kingdom for us so that when we have struggled through our meager existence here on earth we will have a peaceful, luxurious rest for eternity with no problems to distract us from the bliss of paradise.

This picture of detachment and withdrawal from the world does not fit with the Jesus I find in the rest of the New Testament, and I wonder what John means in this passage. While from time to time Jesus is said to have withdrawn to a lonely place, it was not to forsake the world but to renew his strength for being in the world. The Jesus of the New Testament is active in the world. He preaches good news to the poor. He heals the sick. He eats with sinners and tax collectors. He throws the vendors out of the temple. Elsewhere in John, Jesus

prays in his farewell discourse not that his followers be taken from the world but that God would protect us in the world. He said, "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

I think my confusion about this picture of Jesus going away to prepare a place for us stemmed from my idea that this place was far away. Yet in this passage Jesus also says that we know the way. It seemed like a riddle to me. Jesus' whole ministry constantly pointed to discipleship right here and right now in the world. What if the answer to the riddle is that the place Jesus prepared for us was right here, in this world, right now! What if Jesus is prepared to receive us here in this world? What if we are in the mansion already?

Now, my mind gets a little funny with that thought. I think of war, poverty, starvation. People cheating people, hurting each other. The rule of the day seems to be "do unto others before they get a chance to do unto you." There is crime in the highest and lowest levels of our society, there is pain and suffering here in our own congregation. If this is the mansion it's in lousy shape. I can let myself slide into bitterness quite easily.

And yet. And yet. There is the beauty of the city after the rain has cleansed it of smog. There is the sunset and the joy of making love. Can you remember a time when you were so close with someone that you didn't even need words between you? Remember Easter Sunday when everyone sang "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," and you wanted to cry? Truly, even with all the ugliness, God is with us in this world.

This is it! This is our home! It just doesn't look the way we had thought our dream house would look. But here we are! This is it.

It's in a bad neighborhood, the roof leaks, the outside paint is curling, the inside is filthy with hatred, starvation, war and greed. And Jesus has indeed prepared a place for us: the mops and buckets are all laid out. There's a scrub brush with your name on it, too. We don't have to wait any longer, looking for another place to settle down to commit ourselves to, someday. This is it. Jesus has prepared a place for us, and it is our own world, redeemed by his being in it, given back to us as our home. This is our home, and it will be what we make of it.

Now hold on a minute. I mean, I know that Jesus came into the world as a servant, and that he wanted to show us something about God supporting the world. I know that this Jesus person keeps calling me to follow in his footsteps, but you know, he was special. Jesus' relationship to God was a lot closer than mine. He was so close with God that God was able actually to be in the world and act and move and see and touch the world as a person would through his relationship with Jesus. My own relationship with God is not nearly so intimate. I'll follow Jesus, and I'll do what I can, but let's be reasonable.

Except that Jesus said "You will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will you do because I go to the Father." How uncomfortable. How unreasonable. I don't want to be responsible for this mess, and it seems that I don't have any excuses left. If I can do greater works than Jesus, then the world must be in a mess because I have allowed it to be. I have literally let the paradise God created "go to hell." I have been hanging around waiting for somebody else to clean up the mess while I look for the heavenly mansions.

All of us are responsible. We are children of God, and we share the nature of God--we are participators. This was what Jesus showed us about God in the Incarnation: God participates in this world. As children of God we participate in the world too. God was willing to take responsibility for it all, for the sin and suffering, for the whole mess. As children of God we are called to do that also. Oh, we still blame others, set ourselves up to be victims of the universe, bitch and complain. And we can't let ourselves get away with that any longer. As children of God our satisfaction comes from getting the job done, from participating with God, experiencing directly our selfhood as children of God. Jesus has shown us the way and we can't kid ourselves.

We are all responsible. We have consented to the world being the way it is. It is only in being willing to make the mess our own that we can discover that it is our home. I must take responsibility for the world as if I personally had created all the mess there was to clean up! It is in our willingness to follow Christ in doing this, in taking up the cross of this world, that we release an incredible power for transformation into the world. When you are willing to take responsibility for the world, unreasonable as that sounds, you make yourself bigger than all the evil in the world. Only after you have taken responsibility for an evil do you have the power to overcome it.

You do not have to be *able* to overcome evil, but you must be willing. Christ has already taken responsibility for all the evil in the world. He has prepared the way for us. He has gone before. We need only follow. Christ calls us to join his company of servants.

The role of a servant is to take responsibility for cleaning up a mess you didn't make, and for making the mess your own anyway. Cleaning up the mess is the final test of your willingness to be responsible for it. If you say you are responsible and do not take action to clean it up, then you will only make yourself feel bad. That is not responsibility.

Nobody *has* to serve. God will work out God's purpose in the world whether we serve or not. God does not need our help. In the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the transformation of the world was effected, and the rest of time is the unfolding of that event. We are called to follow the example of Jesus because this is the place that Jesus has prepared for *us*. We are called to serve because it is in serving that we uncover our nature as God's children. As we uncover our own identity, we see that reflected in the world around us. We begin to manifest the fruits of the Spirit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control. As we need these special graces in our serving of the world, they become more available. As we are active in the world we discover more and more of our divine nature as children of God, and our light shines so that the world itself becomes transformed. Christ came into the world "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved."

We do not have to wait until the end of time to have God's joy and fulfillment in our lives. It is as we participate in the process of life, in the process of history, that we find ourselves in relationship

with God. This is where God is present and active. This is the place Jesus prepares for us.

And there is more. Our Father's house has many mansions:

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master...For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance.

There will always be something for us to do, a bigger challenge.

Jesus does not call us to a life of eternal rest: he calls us to a journey. He will always be going before us to prepare a place for us. And we do know the way. He invites us to come live in the house of many mansions, and share the abundant life with him.

Opportunity to Participate

This participation to which we are invited is not an abstract idea. There are concrete programs to participate in right here in the church in the coming weeks. We have space available for greeters at the early morning worship services. We have calling committees to visit shut-ins, people in the hospital and new people interested in becoming a part of our church family. The group studying world hunger has some exciting programs coming up in the next six weeks. The relief society which provides food and clothing for the poor in our own community is opening the group for new members to participate in that on-going ministry.

If you would like to participate in any of these programs or in any of our other opportunities here at the church, please raise your hand and the ushers will give you a service offering card. There is

space at the bottom for you to fill in any of your own particular talents or suggestions. Fill the cards out now and put them in the offering or give them to one of the ushers as you leave. You will be getting a call from someone involved with the project you have marked within the coming week.

And now let us praise God with our offerings of ourselves, our time and our money.

Dedication of Offering

Dear God, we give thanks for the many good gifts of life. We especially thank you for the opportunities to participate with you in working out your purposes in the world, and for the chance to expand our own lives as your children in doing so. AMEN.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The purpose of the project was to look at how *est* has contributed to my search for a personal theology and to demonstrate that contribution through a discussion of my theology and preaching.

My method of investigation of *est* was basically my personal involvement. The project was also influenced by such theological biases as the extraordinary influence of the Gospel of John, the writings of Paul and my personal religious background. Definitions of words being used in special ways within the project were given in Chapter 1.

ABOUT *est*

est is one of the fastest growing of the human potential movements. It generates strong opinions from people who have taken the training and from people who have not. People who have taken the training enthuse about the miracles in their lives. People who have not taken it are often skeptical, as I was when I went into the training.

The training was created by Werner Erhard out of his personal experience, the result of what he calls a "catalytic experience of Self." The *est* training is an intensive two-weekend experience designed to create a "space" for others to have that same experience of Self, that Self beyond the personal history of the individual.

Purpose of the *est* Training

The purpose of the *est* training is "to transform your ability to experience living so that situations you have been putting up with or trying to change clear up just in the process of life itself."¹

The Training

The training last for about 60 hours over two consecutive weekends. It includes *data*, which does not have to be believed or remembered; *processes*, exercises in experiencing; and *sharing*, about participants' insights, questions and miracles. Participants agree to a set of ground rules, the training *agreements*.

The training is not so much about the information as it is about the creation of a *safe space* for the participants to look into their lives and have an experience of Self.

Results of the Training

Graduates of the training report miracles of all types, varying with the individual, including quitting smoking, losing weight, improved relationships, and better jobs. In general the results are described as an expanded experience of *aliveness*: love, health, happiness and full Self expression.

¹"What is the purpose of the *est* training?", p. 1.

Opportunities in *est* beyond the Training

The training is complete in itself, and no further participation with *est* is necessary in order to have the results continue in one's life. There are several different opportunities for continued participation for those who desire it, including a variety of graduate seminars and courses and an assistants program.

est as Epistemology

est is not about what one knows, but about how one knows what one knows. Belief as a way of knowing is especially examined in the training. Everything we know we know through either the intellectual/logical/conceptual mode of knowing or through the intuitive/feeling/sensing mode of knowing. Many have said this before. The contribution of *est* is that in the training one has an experience of transcending all of this and having a direct experience of the Self which is the context of our knowing.

est and Christianity

Werner Erhard says that the promise of religion is joy, aliveness, and relationship to God. His challenge to religious leaders is to stop trying to prove that we have the only right answer and start delivering on the promise of religion. *est* has transformed my own experience of Christianity from being a belief system to being a vital and alive experience which does in fact produce joy, aliveness and relationship to God in my life.

A THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION
CHILDREN OF GOD, NOT SAVED SINNERS!

Christians are called to a new life in this world, not to another life apart from this world. Christ offers us life "in all its fullness," freed forever from the power of sin and alienation. Too often Christians are so tied to the *belief* about freedom from sin and alienation that we do not have the *experience* of this new life of freedom. Even one who finds one's identity in being a "saved sinner" cannot be totally freed from the power of sin over his/her life. Even a "saved sinner" is still a sinner, and as long as one finds one's identity in sin in any form one cannot be free from its power. A "saved sinner" is only a changed sinner. We must be transformed.

Born Again

The Gospel of John says that we must be "born again." We must die to our old self. We must die to our sin, and even to our belief that we are saved from sin. When we die to everything, we are resurrected, or "born again" into new life in Christ. I use the term "child of God" to describe this new being in Christ, in order to make it clear that our identity is based on our fundamental relatedness to God, and not on our alienation from God. Children of God still commit wrong doings, and they find their identity in their relationship with God, not in their sin. Everything in our lives is a fruit of the context out of which we live our lives. If we live in the context of alienation, we will have only the fruits of alienation. If we live

out of the context of being children of God, we will have the fruits of the Spirit. Confession, choice, evangelism, and social action are examples of activities which have different fruits when done out of the context of alienation and when done out of the context of being a child of God.

Life in the Spirit

There is no righteousness about life in the Spirit. Only people whose freedom from sin and alienation is based on a belief have to prove that belief to others and to themselves. The fruits of the Spirit speak for themselves. God does not call us to believe in an abundant life. God calls us to live our lives out of God's own abundance!

Life in the Spirit flows out of fulfillment of our relationship with God, it is not a search for that fulfillment. Evangelism and social action are an expression of the Self as a child of God.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF *est* TO MY PREACHING

I used to have the idea that preaching was about presenting a logical argument for consideration of the listeners with the hope that they would be convinced by that argument and base their lives on what they had heard. I am now clear that we are more than our minds, and that if the sermon is going to have any impact on peoples' lives it must address the whole person. The purpose of a sermon is to allow people to examine their lives in such a way as to have a direct

experience of their true selves as children of God, to create the space for them to make a commitment to the life in the Spirit, and to support them in that life.

The Preacher's Relationship to God

The sermon addressed to whole persons comes out of the whole person of the preacher as well. My *est* experience has allowed me an opportunity to look deeper into my own life than I had ever done before taking the training. Out of that experience of self-examination has come the willingness to continue looking at my own experience. I am now more willing to confront, acknowledge, and confess my own sin and barriers between me and God and between me and others. I am able to do this in the context of a nurturing relationship with God that allows me to be cleansed and to let go of my confessed sin so that I can move on to the next experience in life. I do not have to preach about a one-time experience of God that changed my life, but happened so long ago that it is only a belief now. I can preach out of the context of a continued moment by moment experience of life in the Spirit.

The Preacher's Relationship with the Congregation

I have a new clarity of my purpose as a minister. This includes the recent discovery of my biggest barrier to serving people and a new ability to serve as I let go of that barrier and move on in my relationship with others.

The Sermon Form

Seeing people's lives transformed as a result of their participation in the *est* training and examining that form has allowed me to gain new insights into the sermonic form. I have gained a new appreciation of the value and potential of this form as a result of this project.

The Sermon Process

A sermon addressed to the whole person looks different from one addressed only to a person's mind. It should focus on the listener and should engage the whole person. It should confront people when appropriate. It should include an opportunity for confession, for making a choice (rather than a decision) about one's life, and for participating in some concrete action as a way of responding to the sermon.

THE SERMONS IN THIS PROJECT

The Bible became much more of a living book for me after graduating from the *est* training. I now find I preach out of my personal experience of the Scripture truths, rather than only out of interpretations by authorities. I have also noticed that I used to preach "nice" sermons as a way of avoiding my own discomfort with the Gospel message about sin and alienation. I am not so unwilling to confront my own evil now and am more willing to support others who want a safe space to confront the truth about their lives.

To Walk in the Newness of Life

This sermon is about looking at our beliefs as a barrier to the experience of moment by moment relationship with God that is available in the life in the Spirit.

As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us

This sermon allows people to look at their judgments of others as a barrier to the abundant life, and opens the space for people to begin to let go of their judgments as a barrier to this life.

Come Live in the Mansion!

This sermon allows people to look at their own participation in life and to discover the life of a servant/disciple as an expression of who they really are as children of God. It also offers the opportunity to look at their willingness to live as servant/disciples and to begin to move in the direction of making a choice about this.

CONCLUSION

This project has been concerned with my search for a personal theology and with the influence of *est* on that theology. This search began in college when I had an experience of an alive faith in the group of Christians there. I could not hold that experience in the same way that the others explained it. In seminary I began to discover bits and pieces of a theology that more adequately describes

what I thought the Christian experience to be. However, with the explanation, I lost the experience.

I took the *est* training and participated extensively in the graduate programs there, and I was nurtured in my life as a result. I found myself using theological language to describe my *est* experience. This project has given me the opportunity to clarify for myself exactly what is the relationship between *est* and Christianity for me, and exactly how did *est* influence my theology and ministry.

I discovered that my theology is very little different than before I took the training. I sometimes phrase things a little differently at times. The main difference that I see is that I now hold my theology as experience rather than only as belief. The Scriptures, theology and preaching are now a part of my actual experience of daily life. They no longer represent beliefs that I must conform to in order to call myself a Christian. I am nurtured by my faith, and I experience joy, peace, satisfaction and aliveness arising out of my relationship with God.

I am now clear that my purpose as a minister is to create the space for others to have an experience of themselves as children of God and to support them in their lives so that they, too, might have the joy, peace, satisfaction and aliveness which is the fruit of living in daily relationship with God.

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VITA

The Rev. Parish-Pixler was born Wesley Burton Pixler on April 26, 1951, in Newburyport, Massachusetts. He graduated from Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, in 1972 with a B.A. in Religious Studies. While at Occidental, he spent his junior year in Japan studying at Waseda University. From 1972 to 1974 he attended Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. In 1974 he transferred to the School of Theology at Claremont, California, where he received his Doctor of Ministry degree in June, 1977. He did field work as Assistant Minister at the East Side United Methodist Church in Chicago, and spent one semester in Clinical Pastoral Education at the California Institute for Women, a state prison in Frontera, California. From September 1976 through May 1977 he served as Assistant Minister to Christian Education at St. Matthais Episcopal Church in Whittier, California. He took the *est* training in September 1975, and participated in graduate seminars, the assistants program, and the Guest Seminar Leaders Program. On August 2, 1975, he married Michele Ann Parish, and became Wesley Burton Parish-Pixler. The Rev. Parish-Pixler is ordained as a Deacon in the United Methodist Church and is a member of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference.